

Mayor's graft

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the cases after an investigation had confirmed the allegations. All the cases are under trial at a senior special judge's court in Chittagong, according to sources.

The joint forces seized all documents in connection with the allegations of corruption and malpractices spearheaded by Mohiuddin during his 13-year stint in the office of the mayor.

The Daily Star obtained copies of some of the documents compiled by the joint forces based on which further corruption charges will be framed against him.

Some of the major financial irregularities detected by the audit are Tk 5.14 crore loss to the CCC due to allotment of shops at a shopping complex to a group of companies instead of shop keepers, issuing of work orders worth Tk 8.61 crore without any tender, spending of Tk 16.80 lakh to buy 35 walkie talkies without a tender, lending of Tk 53.45 lakh to ward commissioners which were not recovered even after the dates for repayments had passed, showing false spending of Tk 18.21 lakh through a false master roll in connection with a canal digging project, buying three cars at a cost of Tk 34.65 lakh despite having three other cars which were operational, lending of Tk 13 lakh to female ward commissioners without charging any interest, and irregularities in spending Tk 31.07 lakh for buying equipment for a canal excavation project.

The corruption cases filed against Mohiuddin by the Bureau of Anti-corruption are in connections with returning a fine of Tk 11.31 lakh to constructors in exchange for financial favours, who were fined for not following the city plan for an earth removal project at a graveyard; bringing financial loss to the corporation through constructing a 11-storey building for Singapore Market on a government land at Gosai Danga; causing financial loss to the government by building a bus terminal on a government land at Nasirabad; building a public toilet on a private property at Nasirabad; and in connection with waiving of a fine of Tk 2.14 lakh of a firm for not properly following the work order in an earth filling and expansion project of the central grave yard by violating government rules in exchange for financial favours.

Besides, eight other cases were filed against Mohiuddin for embezzling Tk 24.24 lakh collected as holding tax during 1994-95 to 2001-02 financial years.

The allegations were confirmed through investigations and charge sheets were also submitted.

Another corruption case was filed against him in connection with irregularities in allotting shops at a passenger shed at Muradpur bus terminal.

There are also allegations that Mohiuddin established a number of institutions at important city centres on government lands violating government rules and regulations.

He was also responsible for cutting a number of city hills creating spaces for residential plots, CNG refuelling stations, and markets.

He set up a private university in the city on government lands without any approval. The university has a number of campuses located at different places in the city.

A campus of Premier University is built on pillars on a road side city canal and another one is built on top of a refuelling station exposing the students to pollution and the danger of an accidental gas explosion.

Mohiuddin also allegedly purchased a second hand dredging machine spending Tk 2 crore. The machine was collected through Alam Trade International for digging Chakital Canal. The machine had an emblem of China Tenjing Fisheries Company on it.

According to the sources city corporation engineers could build such a dredger spending only Tk 6 lakh. The new dredger was not necessary as the canal could have been excavated using dredgers belonging to the Water Development Board or Chittagong Port Authority.

Even after buying the new dredger the mayor spent 800 metric tons of rice and wheat allocated by the government for manual labourers employed for canal digging. The mayor spent Tk 5 crore again in collecting spare parts for the dredger, generators that are usually used in ship breaking yards, and pipes for the project.

He allegedly embezzled several crores of taka by allotting shops to his flunkies and relatives without any open tender or following official procedures.

According to the sources the mayor first allotted the shops to his flunkies and relatives for cheap then sold those to others at higher prices pocketing handsome profit.

He allotted 32 shops at Nasirabad Women College Crossing to Irfan Sharifi Patel, an underaged daughter of a ward commissioner, Maman. The shops were built on pillars on a roadside canal. Twenty three other shops on the ground floor of Shah Amanat Super Market were allotted to Kalu Sarder, known as a flunkie of the mayor. Thirty two shops on the footpath of Muradpur, 12 shops on KCCY Road, five shops on Jail Road, four shops at Memon Hospital were also first allotted to the mayor's own people for cheap and then sold for higher prices to other people.

The corporation could have earned several crores of taka if those shops were allotted through open tenders or news paper advertisements following

official procedures.

Mohiuddin and his close relatives allegedly grabbed Tk 1.5 crore through setting up a pharmaceutical factory on Shagorka Road.

According to the sources, the mayor converted a warehouse into the factory. Nurul Alam, a business partner of the mayor's wife was given the contract for constructing the factory building. Although the government has yet to give any approval for the factory, the mayor already spent about Tk 3 crore for buying second hand machinery for it.

The CCC showed Tk 80 lakh expenditure for producing a movie on the liberation war in Chittagong. The corporation issued five cheques of Tk 10 lakh each to the director of the movie, Abdullah Al Mamun. The remaining Tk 30 lakh was shown as expenditure for hiring artists, renting cars and other logistical support in making the movie. But there was no approval from the Ministry of Local Government for such expenditure for making a movie. Although the movie had been made during Mohiuddin's own party Awami League's regime, it was never released.

Construction and repair works of city roads were controlled by one Jafar Ahmed for the last 10 years. With the blessings of the city mayor he captured most of the construction and repair works using names of three construction firms.

The firms are Chittagong Engineering Construction, SN Traders, and Shahid and Brothers. Hardly any other construction firm got road construction or repair work contracts in the last 10 years.

The mayor took a project at Halisharh to make fuel from garbage, spending Tk 5 crore. The contractor for the project was Nurul Alam, the same business partner of the mayor's wife, Hasina Mohiuddin. Construction of a building for the project had been completed even before a tender was floated.

The city mayor charged 5 to 10 percent from each construction bill of the CCC for a 'mother and child fund'. The corporation earlier used to charge Tk 5 and put stamps on the bills. But in the last two years the mayor charged 5 to 10 percent of each bill in cash for the fund without any stamp.

In the name of introducing a turnkey system by allocating development works without any tender, the mayor actually took unilateral control of the entire contract disbursement process. The new system was designed to give the mayor a free hand in corruption, according to the sources.

Major Mohiuddin Chowdhury also bought a Mitsubishi Pajero four wheel drive at a cost of Tk 45 lakh from a private firm violating government rule.

According to the rule the automobile should have been collected from a government agency. If such a vehicle is collected from Progati Industries, the government's automobile assembly plant, it would cost around Tk 17 lakh.

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Lankan fighting

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Three bodies of the STF commandos were already with the military, officials said, adding that 16 commandos suffered injuries following Friday's heavy shell attacks.

Fighting raged in the area Saturday, but there were no immediate reports of the latest casualties.

In the adjoining district of Batticaloa, troops kept up shelling of suspected Tiger positions in a new offensive to advance into a jungle area held by the guerrillas.

In the east of the island, government troops, backed by artillery and multi-barrel rocket fire, were on the offensive in the districts of Batticaloa and Ampara, where the Tigers control a vast jungle area known as Thoppigala.

The latest offensive is the biggest since troops captured the town of Vakarai from the Tigers in January after weeks of heavy fighting in Batticaloa district.

The government has said it wants to clear the entire eastern province of Tamil Tiger rebels, and Thoppigala is the last rebel bastion in Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

More than 4,000 people have been killed in escalating fighting since December 2005 even though the two sides agreed to a truce five years ago.

UNHCR

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Officer Kitty McKinsey conducted the workshop.

In reply to a query Phiri said according to a survey carried out by her agency in August 2006, there are 250,000 to 300,000 Biharis in Bangladesh of whom about 152,000 are living in 116 camps across the country.

Rephlying to a question, she admitted that the UNHCR has no mandate for the Biharis known as stranded Pakistanis. Phiri, however, said, "We'll maintain our interests until the issues are addressed by the Bangladeshi government."

On some 26,000 Rohingya refugees living in two camps in Cox's Bazar, the UNHCR representative said the door must be kept open for voluntary repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar. "I firmly believe they will go back home because home is home."

She emphasised the importance of improving the living condition and ensuring formal education for the children of the camps.

Phiri expressed desire to begin a discussion with the government to allow the refugees' freedom of movement and right to work.

Currently, the refugees, who have been here for the last 15 years, cannot get out of the camps and are not allowed to work.

She said Bangladesh should ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention.

New car found

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again, said that the international community must address the root causes of terrorism - poverty, hunger, injustice, disasters, displacement etc - to effectively combat this menace."

Mentioning the connection between war and poverty, the veteran diplomat said "The war on terror must also be a war against poverty, the fight against terror must be an inclusive process."

"Explosives, both local and smuggled, have lately proven more deadly, particularly in the hands of the JMB outfit," Professor Imliaz Ahmed of Dhaka University (DU) said in his paper titled 'Terrorism beyond reason: possibilities and limits,' adding, "Such weaponisation of the society cannot be contained only through national efforts."

Regional approach is required in the form of a regional police-civil force for checking the illicit arms trade, money laundering and militant outfit nexus, he further observed.

About Islamisation of Bangladesh politics, Assistant Professor of DU Lailul Arifin in her paper titled 'Indo-Bangladesh Relations: Terrorism in Perspective,' said "Islamisation in Bangladesh's politics started with the deterioration of popularity of the post-independence

Finance adviser

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develop transparency and accountability in public expenditure while minimising adverse consequences," he added.

The adviser also said the government is considering building a partnership with the NGOs in delivering public services to make the most of limited national resources.

"I've already approved three contracts for three municipalities to contract out medical services to NGOs and they were selected through transparent tender process," Arifin said.

Citing recent statistics, he said Bangladesh is keeping pace with India and Pakistan in pursuing the MDGs despite having lower per capita income than both the South Asian countries.

In some areas like water and sanitation services, the country has outdone the two countries.

He, however, noted that the government cannot afford to be complacent when some very difficult challenges lie ahead.

WB Country Director Xian Zhu said he is encouraged by the way the caretaker government is working to bring about an atmosphere conducive to attaining the MDGs and carrying out the poverty reduction programmes.

He said policymakers and development practitioners should use this "unique and historical" moment to debate policies to strengthen development policies and their implementation.

Qaiser M Khan, lead human development specialist for South Asia Region, presented a study report at the seminar. Founder Vice-chancellor of EWU Mohammad Farashuddin made welcome remarks while acting vice-chancellor Mohammad Musa chaired the discussion. Manzur Ahmed, director of Institute of Education Development at BRAC University, Prof Ahmed Neaz of American International University of Bangladesh (AIUB) and AK Enamul Haque of EWU were the other discussants.

The United States also announced a \$25 million reward for any information leading to the arrest or death of bin Laden, but leads on his whereabouts have been few and far between.

Intelligence on the movements of his Egyptian deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, is gathered more frequently.

Ctg port functions

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others are at various stages of implementation.

A three-shift workday has been introduced for dockworkers for ensuring round the clock operation at the port in place of earlier two-shift workdays.

"We are happy about the steps taken by the joint forces so far for saving the port from devastation and accelerating the cargo handling activities," said Mohammad Amirul Haque, chairman of standing committees of FBCCI and CCCI (Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry) on port and shipping.

He hoped that the people would get the benefit of various reforms undertaken at the premier port.

The container handling responsibility at the Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT) has been given to Saif Powertec Limited, a private firm, for an integrated and smooth operation of the port. The company has started its operation since Wednesday.

Saif Powertec now charges Tk 1200 for loading, unloading and transporting a container to and from the delivery yard.

Earlier, the port users were compelled to spend Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000 for the same task as they had to bribe the equipment operators employed by the CPA (Chittagong Port Authority) at various points.

A decision was also taken to handover cargo handling activities of different jetties in general yards to private companies.

Other important steps taken by the task force include shifting handling activities of nine bulk items outside the port area, allowing delivery of Full Container Load (FCL), doing away with monopoly in stevedoring system from hook point, reducing the size of the labour groups, setting up sector wise off-dock inland container depot (ICD), cancellation of unreasonable fees and charges by shipping agents and reducing the number of signatures required from customs and port authorities for clearing papers.

According to sources, ever since the new measures came in effect, the turnaround time of a ship has reduced to 7-8 days from earlier 14-16 days.

Moreover, the congestion inside the port area was minimised greatly since the handling of nine bulk items was shifted outside the port where around 1,000 trucks and 2,000 labourers used to gather for handling the cargo.

In the general yard, importers are now allowed to take on chassis delivery of FCL from hook point. They are also allowed to take the FCL to their

own premises without providing bank guarantee or cheque to mainline operators or shipping lines. Now they are required only to sign a joint guarantee making sure that the container is in good shape.

The dominance of labour leaders has diminished as well and a 'no work no pay' system has been introduced. The stevedoring system has also been abandoned and the size of labourer groups reduced.

The task force has asked different trade bodies to set up sector wise off-dock inland container depot (ICD) for handling goods and reduce pressure on the port yard. Eleven ICDs already exist in the country and a total of eight more such ICDs would be allowed.

The trade bodies that were asked to set up separate ICDs include BGMEA, BTMA, BARVIDA and C&F agents' association.

The charge of Tk 1,000 for Licence Measuring Department (LMD) by CCCI for import of raw cotton has been withdrawn along with the rate restoration charge of \$200 for 20 feet container and \$400 for 40 feet containers by the shipping agents.

The cut-off time of the ships would be fixed after negotiation with BGMEA, according to sources.

The shipping line offices are kept open on Saturdays and allocated office spaces with internet facilities near the 'one stop service centre' to issue delivery orders.

The collection of money by freight forwarders against issuing no objection certificates has also been stopped.

The joint forces also stopped toll collection of Tk 67 from each truck by Panama Truck Stand near the port for issuing gate passes. Fees for container survey, documentation and cleaning have also been fixed reasonably.

The handling charge of bulk cargo from mother vessels to land by lighterage vessels has also been reduced to Tk 127-160 per ton instead of previous rate of Tk 400-500.

The port authority has taken an initiative to purchase a 10 MW generator for operating port equipment during power outage. A 2.5 MW generator had