

WARID DEAL

Koko owns Dubai house under fictitious name

He also put \$2m in Hong Kong banks, steps taken to sell property to pay govt; Babar minted \$7m out of the project

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Investigation into the controversial Warid Telecom deal has revealed how Arafat Rahman Koko, Khaleda Zia's younger son, ripped off millions to buy property in Dubai and build bank deposits in Hong Kong.

Latest interrogation has also revealed that former home minister Lutfozzaman Babar had actually made a huge fortune of \$7 million from the deal.

Steps have already been taken to sell a house in Dubai that he

illegally bought in the name of the son of Ali Asgar Lobi, a former BNP lawmaker, to deposit \$1.5 million with the exchequer as part of the rip-off amount of the Warid Telecom. Lobi's son received instruction from his family yesterday to sell the house.

Sources said Warid had obtained its operating licence in Bangladesh in exchange for a \$15 million graft deal with the Hawa Bhaban clique. The investigators have come to know that the money was shared by Koko, Lobi and Babar.



With his share of the booty, Koko bought the Dubai house and deposited another \$2 million with two banks in Hong Kong. During interrogation, Babar said he retained \$7 million of the deal – \$3 million he kept with him and the rest with his brother. The former state minister for home promised to pay back \$4.5 million, but the rest \$2.5 million has been sent abroad through his brother. Babar also confessed that another \$3.5 million is lying with Lobi. But Lobi,

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EC tests voter listing project in Gazipur from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) starts a pilot project today to gather field-level experience to finalise the methodology of simultaneously preparing the national identity cards and voter list with photographs, on which hinges the fate of all future polls.

On completion of the three-week-long pilot project, which begins in Sripur municipality of Gazipur, the EC will also announce a clear roadmap for the next parliamentary elections.

"In fact, the pilot project is an acid test for the Election Commission. Through this project we will be able to correct faults, if any, in the methodology of preparing the voter list," Election Commissioner Sahul Hossain told

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PHOTO: STAR

HAZARDOUS HABITAT... People still live in the volatile building of the Geneva Camp at Mohammadpur in the capital, as they were yet to be rehabilitated. Several people were injured only a few weeks ago when plaster from the ceiling fell on them.

Nothing in budget to end people's woes: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said people have nothing to expect from the proposed budget as no step has been taken to mitigate the sufferings of people.

Raising question about the legitimacy of the budget that was not placed before an elected parliament, she said no tax can be imposed on the people without their representation.

Hasina was talking with the reporters on the recently announced budget after emerging out of ZH Shikdar Medical College Hospital at Gulshan in the capital, where she went to visit her ailing

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POLL REFORMS

Lift politics ban to get parties in talks

EU Troika asks govt at end of visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The European Union (EU) Troika delegation yesterday said they would be satisfied if elections are held as soon as 'necessary' reforms are completed during 2008.

They asked the government to lift the ban on indoor politics so political parties can engage in dialogues on election reforms.

Concluding their four-day visit, the five-member delegation also expressed 'deep concern' at reported human rights abuses and urged the government for 'prompt

adjudication' of people arrested as corruption suspects to gain people's confidence in the anti-corruption drive.

"The European Union underlines the need to hold parliamentary elections as soon as possible in 2008, with the timing of those elections carefully calibrated to the implementation of necessary reforms," said head of the EU Troika team, Andreas Michaelis, at a press conference at Hotel Sonargaon.

The EU is the largest trading and development partner of Bangladesh, taking in \$5 billion or

52 per cent of Bangladeshi exports and disbursed Tk 3,900 crore in development assistance last year.

Michaelis said they were fully convinced from their numerous meetings with the government, politicians, and the army that a set of 'practical' political and electoral reforms are working towards the elections.

The EU backs any of these reforms that work towards creating a 'sound foundation' for holding free, fair and credible elections.

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Govt firm on holding polls after reforms

CA tells Troika

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday informed the visiting EU-Troika delegation that his government is committed to holding a free, fair and credible election after completion of the ongoing reforms.

"The present caretaker government is committed to democracy and will hand over power to an elected government as early as possible," he told the delegation.

A 10-member delegation of the EU-Troika, led by Ambassador Andreas Michaelis, called on the chief adviser at his office in the afternoon and discussed socio-economic and electoral issues.

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ATTACK ON UK ENVOY

Mufti Hannan, 3 others charged

UNB, Sylhet

Charges have been pressed against Mufti Abdul Hannan of outlawed Harkatul Jihad and three others for the grenade attack on British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury in Sylhet in 2004.

Munshi Aliqur Rahman, ASP of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), yesterday submitted the charge sheet to the Sylhet cognizance court after a lengthy investigation into the incident that occurred at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal (RA) on May 21, 2004.

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Anwar Choudhury

Hasina should quit politics

Quader 'tells' joint forces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader, now detained, is claimed to have said during interrogation that AL chief Sheikh Hasina should quit politics in the prevailing situation.

Quader while being quizzed by the Task Force Intelligence (TFI) strongly criticised Hasina's taking party decisions unilaterally, sources claimed.

"Had she (Hasina) not returned home, senior AL leaders would have formed a committee to run the party. It is not true that the party cannot do without her," sources quoted Quader as saying.

Quader, known to be very close to Hasina, was also quoted to have said that in October last year she

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Derailment of goods train disrupts rail communication

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,

Rajshahi

Rail communication of northern region with other parts of the country has disrupted since Friday night after a goods train derailed at Ahsanganj in Naogaon.

The locomotive and seven other loaded wagons slipped the track at around 11:20pm when the Shantahar-bound train was entering the Ahsanganj Rail Station.

The accident occurred as the driver fell asleep and the train ran ignoring signals to stop outside the station, said Akhtaruzzaman, chief operations superintendent of western railway.

Two relief trains and cranes from Pakshey and Lalmonirhat stations started rescue operation at about 4:45am yesterday and four derailed wagons have been pulled off as of 4:00pm, railway officials said.

The rescue operation was greatly hampered following torrential rain in the afternoon. Besides, the heavy wagons, each weighing over 90 tons, also added to the rescue difficulties, as the capacity of the relief cranes is around 65-tons.

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PHOTO: STAR

This is all that remains of a large tree that once stood on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises. Unscrupulous government officials teamed up with wood traders have long been chopping down trees and selling them.

SANGSAD BHABAN AREA

Syndicated logging goes unabated

PINAKI ROY

A section of government officials have long been making quick buck from illegal sale of trees and grass of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises, Zia Uddin, and the Orthopaedic hospital areas.

Most of those officials are from arboriculture department of the housing and public works ministry that is tasked with looking after the trees and beautifying the area.

With the connivance of lumbermen, they have sold a huge number of trees over the years but little had been credited to the government coffers. They have also sold turf from the parliament building premises without permission.

Recently, a probe committee formed by the chief plantation officer has found evidence supporting the allegation that a syndicate has been active in the illegal sale of trees and grass.

Amirul Bahrain, deputy divisional officer of the arboriculture department at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, and his deputies Mohsin and Nasir Hossain have been

involved in the bootlegging, says the probe report.

Contacted, Amirul said he won't say a word about the allegations.

The probe committee found that Amirul Bahrain and his associates felled a good number of trees in Chandrima Uddyan. Currently, not a single tree stands within a 100-yard radius of the former president Ziaur Rahman's grave. Whereas, only a few years back, trees like acacia, jarul, and malishia would adorn the place and each of those should sell at between Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000 as per the current market value.

The probe report said in last year alone, five acacia and a shishu trees were chopped down. The collective price of those was not less than Tk 40,000 when Amirul deposited only Tk 8,000 to the government fund.

Besides, 90 acacia, koroi, jarul and trees of a few others species on the east-west of Zia Uddyan,

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Ershad denies taking money to join AL-led alliance

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad has expressed his dismay over the confessional statement of Awami League (AL) Joint Secretary Obaidul Quader that the former president was bribed to join the AL-led grand alliance.

"I got surprised and bewildered to see the statement of Obaidul Quader in different newspapers about what he said was that I had taken money from the Awami League to join the grand alliance. It's false, fabricated and fictitious," Ershad said in a statement yesterday.

In the statement, the former president denied his involvement in such 'election business'.

Some newspapers, quoting Quader's statement to the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI), reported that the Awami League had offered more money than BNP did to court him into the mega-coalition formed ahead of the general election scheduled for January, which was later cancelled

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Criminals shoot two for toll

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified gunmen shot two people in Kafur and Pallabi in the capital yesterday.

The injured are Aftab Uddin, 54, a businessman of Dakkhin Kafur, and Shankar Roy, 45, a security guard of a garment factory in Pallabi. Both were receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Two youths went to Aftab's under-construction house in Uttar Kafur around 11:30am and asked him to pay toll after calling their boss "Shikder" over cellphone. They also gave him the number to call. As Aftab refused to make the call, they shot him four times.

In another incident, two gunmen around 7:30am shot Shankar, who was on duty at the entrance gate of a garment factory, in both his legs. The reason behind the attack could not be known immediately. Police, however, suspect the attack might be related to extortion.

\$2.8b investment offer likely from Mittal

UNB, Dhaka

After Indian industrial conglomerate Tata Group, the UK-based Indian giant Mittal Group is also keen to invest in Bangladesh.

A high level delegation of the group, led by its Managing Director VK Mittal, arrives in Dhaka today on a two-day visit to formally place a \$2.8 billion investment offer before the caretaker government.

The Mittal Group is one of the largest business conglomerates in both India and the United Kingdom (UK) with \$2.8 billion investment in 27 countries across four continents—Europe, Asia, Africa and America.

The group has already expressed its keen interest to invest in different sectors in Bangladesh

through its local agent GRH Bangladesh Limited, which is now arranging the visit of the industrial giant's top executives.

The sectors included in the group's investment plan are energy, power generation, coalmine development, and production of ethylene dichloride, caustic soda, LPG (C3) LPG (C4) and hydrogen.

The investment in energy sector, particularly in gas exploration and power generation, will get top priority if the group is given a chance to invest in Bangladesh. Syed G Dastagir Nishad, chairman of GRH Limited, the local agent of Mittal Group, told the news agency.

He said the Mittal Group is set to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Board of

Investment (BoI) seeking to materialise its investment plan and explore business in Bangladesh.

During its stay in the capital, delegation chief VK Mittal, who leads the Global Oil and Energy of the Mittal Group, is expected to call on President Iajuddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed, Energy Adviser Tapan Chowdhury and some influential policymakers of the government.

After its merger with Europe's top steel manufacturer Arcelor, the Mittal Group's ArcelorMittal became the world's number one steel producer with 320,000 employees in more than 60 countries.

Charge hearing in Nasim's graft case starts today

UNB, Dhaka

The charge hearing of a graft case against former telecommunications minister Mohammad Nasim begins at the Special Judge's Court today.

According to the case, Nasim, by abusing power, allowed WorldTel Holdings Limited to install three lakh digital telephones in the country without tender.

Nasim's associate AHS Rahman of the company is also an accused in the case as he was "illegally" appointed consultant by the former minister to supervise the project.

Abdul Hye, an officer of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption, filed the case against Nasim and Rahman with Ramna Police Station on January 8, 2002.

He also investigated the case and submitted the charge sheet against them on June 13, 2002.

'Safeguard tax' drafted to save local industries

NBR proposes more power to detect tax-dodging

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has drafted a rule to protect local industries by imposing 'safeguard tax' on import of products that will pose threat to export items.

The rule, to be promulgated through an ordinance and applied from July 1, also proposed to widen power of the members of the NBR's Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) in detecting tax evasions.

According to the draft rule, a safeguard authority will be formed headed by the chairman of Bangladesh Tariff Commission, who

will decide on infrastructure requirements and required manpower for the authority.

The chairman will identify safeguard taxable products and examine whether excess import of certain products from certain countries really hurt the interest of local industries.

He would then recommend the level of safeguard tax to be imposed on import of the particular products.

Local industries will be able to file complaints with the safeguard authority, according to the draft rule.

It also outlines an investigation policy for the authority. According to

the policy, the authority may recommend an interim tax on the imported product on the basis of a preliminary investigation.

It may take eight months or a timeframe to be specified by the government to finish the investigation. The probe report would propose taxes and duration of its regime.

The government would repay the tax amounts to the importers if the allegations were found false, according to the policy.

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