

## Sircar drew Tk 28 lakh

## Army chief for end to corruption

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(CAG) however termed the Speaker's actions regarding withdrawal of the medical allowance unlawful and unethical.

"The speaker has ignored the laws by approving his medical bill. He cannot take the medical bill in such an unprecedented way," immediate past Speaker advocate Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star.

Sircar has approved the medical bill unethically, former CAG M Hafizuddin Khan said, adding, "The Speaker will have to return the money to the government exchequer since he can in no way approve this medical bill."

In the seventh parliament the office of the CAG had objected to such a medical allowance, which was approved by the then speaker late Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, he said.

But this time, the office of the Controller General of Accounts, which was separated from the office of the CAG during the tenure of the last BNP government, did not raise any objection to the Speaker's medical allowance. An official entrusted with looking after the accounts of the Jatiya Sangsads said they had cleared the bill on receiving the Speaker's undertaking.

"The Parliament Secretariat sent the undertaking to us and we cleared the bill," said an official.

Officials in the Parliament Secretariat said they had initially objected to the bill, as the existing laws do not allow the Speaker to have the medical bill for his treatment abroad without prior permission of the prime minister.

But Sircar on July 7, 2006 came up with a written undertaking and guaranteed that he would be responsible for paying the bill, if any question is raised in future.

On receiving the written undertaking and instructions, the Parliament Secretariat cleared a medical bill of Tk 27.86 lakh, said the officials.

On other occasions also, the speaker withdrew good amounts of money in the name of his medical allowances, said a source in the Parliament Secretariat.

**SPEAKER'S UNDERTAKING**

The Speaker and Deputy Speaker (Remuneration and Privileges) Act 1974 says other allowances and facilities of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker shall be the same as admissible to a minister under the act of 1973, Jamiruddin Sircar said in his undertaking.

Being the chief of the executive, the prime minister gives approval for some medical facilities outside the country for a minister, if necessary, he said.

Sircar said exercising the provision 12 of the Special Medical Attendance Rules 1950, former prime minister Sheikh Hasina during the seventh parliament approved Tk 35.71 lakh for the then speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury's kidney treatment abroad.

The prime minister also approved Tk 5.74 lakh for treatment of the then chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdulla, he continued.

Referring to the prime minister's approval for former chief whip's treatment, former CAG Hafizuddin said his office had raised objection to the medical bill of Hasnat Abdulla as the then Speaker of the seventh parliament approved it.

Later, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina had approved the bill by exercising the relevant rules, Hafizuddin said referring to the Special Medical Attendance Rules.

Jamiruddin Sircar himself mentioned that the then prime minister Khaleda Zia had approved special medical allowances for the VIPs in eighth Jatiya Sangsads, but the prime minister did not accord approval for his medical expenditure abroad.

In such a situation, the speaker claimed, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was informed of the matter and the PMO suggested settling it according to the Jatiya Sangsads law 1994. "It seems the prime minister does not want to exercise his power in this regard," goes Sircar's undertaking.

The Jatiya Sangsads Act 1994 does not contain any provisions regarding medical allowances for the Speaker or any lawmakers.

The act however says the Speaker will be the final authority regarding the expenditure of the Parliament Secretariat's annual budget. Jamiruddin Sircar exercised this power also to clear his medical bill.

The Speaker is the final authority regarding the Parliament Secretariat's annual budget and he will be responsible to the parliament through the office of the CAG, said the Speaker in his undertaking.

**EXPERT OPINION**

Asked whether or not the Speaker can approve such medical bill to meet the expenditure of his treatment abroad, former Speaker Abdul Hamid said the Speaker is entitled to an annual medical allowance of Tk 2 lakh in the country. But to have the money, he will have to submit copy of the bills and vouchers in the Parliament Secretariat, he said.

"If the Speaker wants to have medical treatment abroad, he will have to bear the expenditure himself, unless he falls sick during an official visit abroad. The prime minister however can allocate a

special amount of money for the Speaker's treatment abroad," Hamid said, referring to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker (Remuneration and Privileges) Act.

Terming the Speaker's action unprecedented, Hafizuddin, also a former adviser to the caretaker government, said if the Speaker's activities raise questions due to lack of transparency, then how the Jatiya Sangsads will ensure transparency and accountability of the government.

This correspondent in last two days repeatedly tried to contact the Speaker over telephone, but failed as his personal staff, both at his residence and office, replied each time that the Speaker was busy.

It was not possible to visit the Speaker's office to talk to him due to restrictions on journalists' entry into the parliament building. The Speaker imposed the restriction about three months ago following newspaper reports about irregularities in the Parliament Secretariat.

## ACC chief

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and bringing the culprits to book," Hasan Mashhud said.

The ACC boss also emphasised paying reasonable remuneration to public servants and advocated for creating social awareness against the scourge of corruption involving the mass media and civil society.

He also asked to enact tough laws and implement these without fear and favour. "Remove the blocks in the way of fair prosecution; remove the taints, if any, in the judicial system. Hire good lawyers and produce good evidence to get the desired verdicts," ACC chief said.

He also stressed on enhancing efficiencies of the agencies including the ACC, judiciary, police, National Board of Revenue, Audit and Comptroller General's Office and the Bangladesh Bank to fight against corruption.

"Over the decades corruption has been patronised politically which explains its being immune to eradication efforts," Hasan Mashhud felt. "Political will, which is imperative for fighting corruption, simply does not exist."

**Rights activists**

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suffering from serious illness.

Advocate Sultana Kamal of Ain O Salish Kendra, Shaheen Anam of Manusher Jonno Foundation, researcher Dr Hameeda Hossain, Farida Akhter of UBINIG, Begum Shamshun Nahar of Nari Pakhao and Dr Naila Khan of Sommilito Nari Samaj signed the letter.

"In particular, we would like the government to take cognisance of some of the persons who need immediate medical treatment such as Sigma Huda, who is suffering from diabetes, heart and kidney problems and Sabera Aman, who has breast cancer."

Because of these serious complaints they need immediate medical treatment, but have not been given hospitalised care, the letter said.

Assuring the government that their appeal is based purely on humanitarian ground, they said, "We believe that law should take its course and justice prevail equally for everyone."

## Hasina, Khaleda

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cannot avoid the responsibility for corruption committed during their rules," Matin said, adding: "If necessary, they'll be brought to justice."

Dismissing the allegation that only politicians are being charged with corruption, he said the anti-corruption drive is not targeting any particular individual or quarter. Actions are being taken against those involved in corruption, he said.

To another question, Matin said initiative to form a national security council taken soon after the present caretaker government took power is now in cold storage.

The adviser said the National Coordination Committee on Serious Crimes approved 17 cases to be filed against 18 people.

He said relevant documents for filing the cases will be sent to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

## 2 die

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measuring about 25 feet in height and 30 feet in width, collapsed on the workers working under the gate at 2:10pm. Thirteen workers got trapped under the rubble.

Of the two deceased, one died on the spot while the other died on way to hospital.

About 25 construction workers were working on the site at the time.

Officials from the Fire Brigade and Civil Defense in Tongi thronged the spot immediately and rescued the trapped workers. The injured were taken to local clinics and to Tongi Medical College and Hospital.

The construction work of the medical college has been going on for four years.

It is suspected that use of sub-standard construction materials caused the collapse.

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Against Corruption (Gopac) at Hotel Radisson in the capital.

The government is also using South Asian examples from Pakistan and India, alongside others, as 'useful guides' to design legal frameworks and to set up codes of conduct against corruption, said the general.

But he identified 'creating a moral high ground against corruption' as the biggest challenge, as many people have become accustomed to underhanded ways'.

For South Asia, he said the major areas of corruption have been major defence deals, development projects, election funding, politically sponsored criminality, abuse of power, money laundering, and human and drug trafficking.

Moeen also stated foreign donors saying, "Foreign aids or investments have political and strategic considerations attached to them rather than having the economic needs and policy reforms of the recipients as priority issues." He added, "In some cases, about 40 percent of these aids are spent by their consultants or experts."

In his seven-point proposal Gen Moeen said there must be a parliamentary ombudsman in order to strengthen parliamentary oversight of state activities, and to ensure that lawmakers do not only attend the parliament and tow the party lines, but also stand up and express their views to spark genuine debates.

He also recommended creation of a 'moral high ground against corruption', ensuring exemplary punishment for all guilty of corruption, establishment of an independent and neutral judiciary, socially boycotting the corruptionists, reorganisation of a pay increase for the police force, and continuing 'regular' drives against corruption and its agents.

The General also said lack of transparency and accountability can largely be attributed to a lack of political will which is a direct consequence of the confrontational nature of politics'.

When an audience member suggested that individuals be prohibited from participating in elections once they are found guilty of corruption, Moeen said the Election Commission is looking into the possibility of it.

"You can bring as many reforms as you want, but if you don't educate your voters then they will elect the same people again," he said adding that voters should be informed of the consequences of voting for the corruptionists.

"We must educate voters so that parties cannot buy votes and voters do not have to sell their votes. A voter will have to know that by voting for the corrupt, they will be eating one very good meal, in exchange for going hungry for five years," he said.

Moeen said, "Every effort has to be undertaken for rectification and implementation!"

The important thing is for us to judge what is good for us, and then we can borrow good policies and plans from anywhere else in the world," he said.

Asked about the nature of an impending legislation on political funding, Moeen said no one previously asked the political parties to disclose their finances in Bangladesh's history, but now the 'people are asking about the source of the money, and if their accounts are audited or how they are using the money'.

He said the Election Commission (EC) will 'make it into a law' once it discusses the matter with political parties.

When former BNP lawmaker and

ex-agriculture minister MK Anwar from the audience suggested that improvements in the education sector is an imperative for creating informed voters and to strengthen the moral fabric of the population, Moeen agreed, but added, "My question to you is, your party was in power for the last five years, why didn't they do anything? If you addressed these problems then the problem would be reduced by now."

However, Moeen went on to say that the education sector itself has become very corrupt and that the country is full of ghost schools and teachers'. He said in those ghost schools, teachers take their wages from the state but never attend classes and the money pumped to improve the schools never reaches the schools.

"No one has looked into this in the last 36 years, but it is better late than never, so let's come together to fight," he added.

We are also learning from the experiences in South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia.

Regarding the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), he said the reconstituted commission had to fill the gaps in the faulty previous act and at the same time had to root out corrupt ACC officials who had been using the regulatory commission as a platform for their misuse of power.

Referring to Tuesday's comment by Moeen that even NGOs are 'apparently' corrupt, an audience member pointed out that NGOs have been the 'driving force' of 'positive elements' in the country.

Moeen also credited the press freedoms behind much of the success of India's economy, and accountability in the United Nations.

The army chief said the Indian and Pakistani examples in fighting corruption will be a 'useful guide'.

He cited Indian press freedom, establishment of Central Vigilance Commission for receiving general complaints on abuse of power there, and legal protections for government whistleblowers there to enhance transparency.

An audience member asked Moeen, why lessons have to be taken from the 'military government' of Pakistan, prompting Moeen to retort, "Let me reassure you, the army is not ruling the country. Anyone can think anything they want. As I said before, some people smell a rat in everything."

"But it is always good to take good examples, what is wrong with that?" he asked adding, "Regardless of their form of government, if a state is doing a good job, pick it up and implement it!"

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When former BNP lawmaker and

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar opened the workshop and also presented a paper on corruption while Kuwaiti lawmaker Naser Al Sane, and the vice-chair of the Arab regional chapter of GOPAC also spoke on the occasion.

## Nine of a family

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Local sources said the elderly family members tied up the younger ones with clothes and then, altogether, jumped under the train.

Local people described the incident as a "preplanned suicide" as a grave was dug on the premises of their house and a coffin was also kept there. They said the family had confined themselves to their house and led an isolated life.

Police cordoned off the house, 10 yards from the place of occurrence. They sent the bodies to Mymensingh Medical College for autopsies.

A joint team of Rab intelligence wing and Rab-9 then raided Faruq's rented house in the capital's Mirpur at around 10:00am on Tuesday following information given by the arrestees.

Rab officials said sensing their presence, Faruq opened fire on Rab personnel. Rab responded to it with fire and Faruq was injured. He was then arrested, and two pistols, bullets, computers, CDs and books on jihad were seized from his house.

At the press briefing, Rab Director General Hassan Mahmood Khandakar said arrest of the JMB leaders particularly the two Shura members is a remarkable success of their activities. "We will not stop with this success, we will continue our efforts to combat militancy," he added.

Earlier, Rab Intelligence Wing Director Lt Col Asif Ahmed Ansari briefed journalists about the raids.

**Rab captures 2**

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November 14, 2005. The other six including JMB supremo Abdur Rahman and his deputy Bangla Bhai were executed in different jails on March 29.

During the raids on Tuesday and Monday, Rab personnel seized two 9mm pistols with nine bullets, seven computers, a large number of compact disks (CDs) and books on jihad'.

Rab officials told a press briefing yesterday they arrested the two top JMB leaders following leads from Sigma Huda and Saiful Islam.

Locals in Muktaghacha upazila of Mymensingh caught Sagar and Saiful and handed them over to police when they were fleeing after gunning down madrasa teacher Rafiqul Islam at Titia village on Monday morning.

The two arrestees were then taken to local camp of Rab-9 where they were quizzed. Both admitted that they killed Rafiq on orders from Faruq and Rakib.

Acting on information given by a team led by Rab Mymensingh camp commander Major Iqbal raided Rakib's house in

Bangladesh reached 53-2 before rain again stopped the proceedings and after a long break, they only returned to action in the last session to face only eleven overs when spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran piled on the misery by picking up the wickets of Rajin Saleh and Nafees.

Rajin, who failed to open his account in 29 deliveries, was clueless as Muralidaran 'doosra' and edged to Mahela who took a sharp catch at first slip.

It was not so easy for the tourists to concentrate after so many interruptions but the way Nafees got out frustrated his teammates when the left-hander unnecessarily went for a reckless shot to give a simple catch to Sujveera at mid-off. Nafees looked well composed but once again killed his innings prematurely for only 29 off 77 balls, featuring four boundaries.

Both Inam and Mofazzal, former bureaucrats, made the remarks after visiting BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at his Gulshan residence.

They also said there is no other alternative but to implement the reforms since it is the desire of the government.

"How could she [Khaleda] term the reform [initiative] a conspiracy when she herself also spoke of reforms?" questioned Inam Ahmed Chowdhury.

"I'm looking very carefully at the circumstances that surround his visit to Pakistan," said Prime Minister Gordon Brown.