

Koko & commission

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name of a Malaysia-based company violating both Foreign Exchange Regulation Act and Money Laundering Prevention Act.

Back in February, Khaleda Zia's ex-personal secretary AHM Nurul Islam in an interview with the Bangla daily Prothom Alo said Koko lobbied for Global Agro Trade Private Ltd, which in 2004 received the contract to run the Dhaka ICD for seven years.

"But the tender invited by the Chittagong Port Authority in 2003 mentioned that the contract would be awarded for five years only. Interestingly, this company had no previous experience in this field and did not have the necessary machinery to operate an ICD. I remember the former prime minister's son Arafat Rahman visited her several times to lobby for the company before the purchase committee made its decision. The purchase committee had once rejected the proposal, but through intensive lobbying, the proposal was raised in the purchase committee again and the contract was approved," Nurul Islam said on record.

Between 2001 and 2006, Koko's

business firm Advance Ad secured nearly 80 percent market share of the Tk 150-crore-a-year outdoor advertisement business sector by capturing the most lucrative advertisement spots owned by government agencies in the city. Advance Ad has been closed since January.

All throughout the tenure of the last BNP-led government, the government agencies including Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) did not dare to risk the repercussions and silently catered to Koko's whim.

Due to Koko's flagrant violation of DCC rules and regulations, for instance, not paying spot rental for billboards on time, the DCC earned only Tk 70 lakh in revenue during the years 2004 and 2005 against its target revenue of Tk 30 crore for the period.

Advance Ad did a brisk business when a massive city beautification project was undertaken in the capital in the run-up to the 2005 Saarc Summit. Under the facelift project, Koko's firm bagged numerous billboards, unipoles and neon signs along the VIP road from Zia International Airport to Bangla Motor intersection where many noticeable spots such as Mohakhali

Rail Crossing, Shaheed Jahangir Gate, Bijoy Sarani and Farmgate are located.

A number of outdoor ad firms alleged that Koko pulled rank on the DCC, Roads and Highways and Bangladesh Railway to cancel the advertisement deals with other agencies before the Saarc beautification started in late 2003.

They said the DCC had removed all billboards along the Airport Road only to hand over the spaces to Advance Ad as well as to a few other small advertisement firms.

Advance Ad charges clients as high as Tk 10 lakh per year, disregarding the government rates of Tk 50 per square foot of advertisement on a private property and Tk 150 per square foot on a government property.

According to the rates set by Advance Ad, its income from the Airport Road alone should be around Tk 30 crore a year, said an industry insider.

Koko is also reported to have benefited from monopolising advertisements on Bangladesh Television (BTV), the sole state-owned television channel. BTV reportedly bent its rules to allot one

hour of its peak time from 8:30pm to 9:30pm for commercials to Ad Media, an enterprise of Advanced Ad.

Koko also held the chairman post of Development Committee of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). Furthermore, despite having no prior experience, he was a member of BCB's advisory group. It is alleged that he controlled BCB affairs, including ticket sales for international matches, by pulling the strings from behind.

Sources at the BCB said Koko had used his posts for huge financial gains during the renovation work of Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla Stadium.

Koko is also reported to have been involved in the initiative to prepare machine-readable passports and the management handing over of Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong.



PHOTO: PID

Members of Indian National Defence College pose for photograph with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at his office yesterday.

From a housewife to premiership

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was assassinated in 1981 during an abortive military coup and Gen Ershad came to power a year later.

Conspicuous by her low profile and image as the retiring housewife during her husband's presidency, Khaleda rose to prominence when she was appointed vice-chairman of BNP in 1982, the party founded by Ziaur Rahman in 1979. She later assumed the BNP chair in August, 1984.

Much like her political rival Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina-Khaleda was brought in to quell the rising tensions within the party, unite the disparate forces within the party and fill in the power vacuum in BNP following Ziaur Rahman's death.

As BNP chair, she worked to unify political opposition to the authoritarian Ershad regime, forming a seven-party coalition alongside a similar grouping formed by the BNP's main rival, the AL.

During the nine years of military rule, Khaleda Zia was arrested seven times.

While she led the BNP's movement against the Ershad regime, she faced three attempts to break up the BNP from powerful forces within the party. Khaleda's adroit management of these three blows to the BNP strengthened her hold within the party and cleared her way to launch the upsurge against Ershad with a united BNP.

By 1990, discontent over Ershad's rule and support for the opposition political parties had grown sufficiently to convince the president to step down and organise fresh elections. Khaleda Zia led the BNP to a convincing victory in February 1991.

The 1991-96 Khaleda-led govern-

ment was comparatively successful in revising the country's presidential system in favour of a parliamentary system, restoring the country's flagging economy with nominal signs of corruption. But, her government was largely blamed for holding farcical elections in February 1996, which were boycotted by the AL, ensuring a BNP victory, and Khaleda Zia had her second term in office in February. However, agitations continued and she called for fresh elections for June, which the BNP lost to the AL.

But, her last term in office, between 2001-2006, was marked by unprecedented corruption, widespread abuse of power and flagrant violation of state regulations that subsequently triggered the violence and political crisis that precipitated the declaration of emergency on January 11.

She was heavily criticised by senior BNP leaders for stacking up the party leadership and cabinet posts with her sons, nephews, brothers, sisters and other relatives, which was not the case during her husband's regime or her own in 1991-96 government.

A critical turning point and burning example of this unchecked nepotism was the sacking and expulsion of erstwhile president of Bangladesh and BNP founding member, Badruddoza Chowdhury in the same party meeting, which promoted Khaleda's son Tarique Rahman to the post of senior joint-secretary-general of the party.

Khaleda's patronage of the corrupt and criminal elements within the BNP and its coalition partners in government gave her regime an aura of invincibility that allowed her party members—including her two sons—to demonstrate a minimum of account-

ability for their actions. The BNP had assumed power in 2001 with two-thirds majority.

Her last term in office also saw most violent expression of militancy in the country with her reported patronage of Bangla Bhai, who played a vital part in the creation of Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), responsible for the 469 near-simultaneous bomb blasts on August 17, 2005.

The longest serving prime minister in Bangladesh's history, Khaleda Zia was inaugurated for her third official term as prime minister of Bangladesh on 10 October 2001.

Electon on 1 October 2001 were preceded by high levels of violent unrest and yielded a sweeping victory of the BNP and its coalition allies. The BNP secured 66 percent of the seats in parliament leaving the AL with just 20 percent. Khaleda Zia was inaugurated as prime minister nine days later.

Khaleda was born on August 15, 1945 in Dinajpur to businessman Iskander Mazumdar from Feni and his wife Taiyeba Mazumdar, a well-known social worker. Her late sister Khurshid Jahan Haq was a minister for women and children affairs and her brother Sayeed Iskander was a member of parliament. She has another sister and a brother.

At the age of 15, she married the then captain Ziaur Rahman in 1960 right after she passed her SSC examinations and then attended Surendranath College in Dinajpur where she attained her HSC in 1962.

In 1971, she was under the custody of the Pakistani military with her two sons. She has another sister and a brother.

Khaleda Zia, on the other hand, turned the country into a failed state: she is responsible for all the crises the country is now into," the former AL general secretary alleged, adding that the BNP-led coalition government resorted to wholesale corruption, misrule, torture and repression and desecrated the country.

"Corruption cases should be filed against Tarique Rahman at first," he observed.

He expressed his dissatisfaction over the government's stance on Jamaat-e-Islami and asked to know why no cases have been filed against the party's top brass.

"The government should look into the matter," he suggested.

Al leaders Motia Chowdhury, Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, Maj Gen (retd) Subid Ali Bhuiyan and Advocate Rahmat Ali were, among others, present at the briefing.

The Khaleda-led coalition government also destroyed the entire electoral process, he alleged.

"So we don't want to compare the two leaders. We don't want to denigrate one or uplift the other through

comparison," said Zillur.

Alleging that many BNP leaders who were involved in corruption have not yet been arrested, Zillur questioned why cases have not been filed against Tarique Rahman when he presided over widespread corruption during the tenure of the previous coalition government.

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comparison," said Zillur.

Many low-income people claimed the arrest did not affect them at all as it would not bring any positive changes to their lives. "It does not matter whether they were arrested or not as it does not bring any good to us," said Shah Ali, owner of a pharmacy at Karwan Bazar in the city.

He claimed he has not seen any changes in the lives of low-income people since the caretaker government came to power. Rather the prices of essentials are going up and out of their reach, he said.

During their "corrupt" regimes the situation was far better, he said adding that the government should concentrate more on price hike of essentials rather than arresting top political leaders.

Many claimed the government's move would not bring any positive changes for the country rather it might even create an anarchic situation.

He died of a cardiac arrest on July 19.

'No quarter provoked students for agitation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

South Asian People's Union Against Fundamentalism and Communism (SAPUAC) and Forum for Secular Bangladesh (FSB) yesterday

blasted an intelligence report that claimed to have found a conspiracy between some university teachers and Indian officials behind the recent clash between the students and law

enforcers.

In an open letter to chief adviser and army chief, Shahriar Kabir, acting president of FSB and general secretary of SAPUAC, said the report is fabricated as well as motivated and therefore unacceptable.

"If I am involved in this conspiracy, action should be taken against me,

but if the intelligence report is found wrong and politically motivated, then action should be taken against the authorities concerned," said Shahriar.

He said instead of revealing the inherent causes of the student agitation, the intelligence agency is inventing conspiracy against the anti-Jamaat teachers involving them with Indian authorities.

"This kind of intelligence report will create obstacle to ongoing investigation of the incident," he added.

Meanwhile, Prof. Dr. Md. Hannan Shah, an adviser to the party chairperson, yesterday at a news briefing held in his Mohakhali residence, said, "The chairperson expelled the two leaders according to the party constitution."

"An announcement will come from the detained party chief within the next 72 hours through her lawyers," he said when reporters asked him who will lead the party now in absence of Khaleda Zia.

"But there is no provision in the party constitution for appointing an acting chairperson," he added.

On Sunday night, Khaleda talked to a few party leaders including Hannan Shah regarding party affairs and following the discussion she signed the two letters of expulsions and the appointment letter. She made the announcement when a judge ordered her to be sent to a sub-jail.

Later, after a meeting with the newly appointed Secretary General Khadaker Delwar and lawyers, Hannan Shah read out the letters of expulsions and the appointment letter to journalists.

BHUIYAN'S STATEMENT

Khaleda Zia later alleged that a group of leaders led by Hannan Shah were hatching conspiracies to break up the party, but Bhuiyan rejected the allegation.

Bhuiyan and his followers tried to

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briefing after a series of meetings with party leaders in his Gulshan residence, said, "I firmly reject her decision as it is unusual and because everyone has the right to defend oneself."

About 130 leaders including a few standing committee members, former ministers and lawmakers in a joint statement also rejected the expulsions and termed the decision as 'undemocratic and unconstitutional'.

"Khaleda Zia herself pushed the party towards a rift through the undemocratic decision of expelling the secretary general and the joint secretary general," read the statement, signed by Lt Gen (retd) Mahabubur Rahman, member of the national standing committee, the highest policy making forum of the party.

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Mannan Bhuiyan at a press briefing categorically termed the expulsions as 'undemocratic and unacceptable.'

"The announcement of the expulsions is undemocratic, unacceptable and against the party constitution. I am firmly rejecting the announcement," he said in a written statement.

He said, "The image of the party had been tarnished before the historic 1/11...we took necessary initiatives to restore it. Honest and dedicated party leaders and in fact all the people of the country supported the move."

"The regrettable divisive steps taken by the party chief at a time when the party is facing a crisis is making us anxious because the party unity should have been maintained at any cost," he said, adding that the expulsions are merely an expression of a divisive plot.

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