

Institutional graft

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Nurul Islam, former additional secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, Nazrul Islam, former energy secretary, Manik Lal Samaddar, former secretary to the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry, and Mirza Tosaddok Hossain Begh, former information secretary.

"Nothing can be said at the moment regarding the Gatco case as the investigation is still on and the investigators have yet to finish interrogating all the persons in connection with the case," said the ACC chairman.

"Comments should not be made when a case is before a court," he added.

Eight former secretaries to different ministries, who had been connected to the Gatco deal, were summoned on Thursday by the ACC in connection with the graft case filed by the commission implicating former premier Khaleda Zia.

Three of the summoned secretaries gave their statements to the commission on Sunday while five former ministers of Khaleda Zia's cabinet were also questioned on September 25 in connection with the case filed on September 2.

"My duty was to help the committee that dealt with the Gatco deal. As the IMED secretary, my work was to monitor the implementation of the work already awarded," said Manik Lal Samaddar.

"I have given the commission the facts I know, and I can't say anything beyond that," said Mirza Tosaddok Hossain Begh.

The ACC on Sunday questioned Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairman Sadat Hossain, Additional Secretary to the Communication Ministry ATKM Ismail, and former shipping secretary Zulfiqar Haider Chowdhury.

Investigation officer (IO) of the case ACC Deputy Director Johirul Huda also received a statement of another former information secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan over the

phone, as the latter is currently abroad.

The secretaries were questioned because they had been in charge of different ministries connected with the Gatco deal.

A three-member investigation committee comprising the IO, and national taskforce members Maj Mustafa Kamal and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Inspector Nurul Islam, quizzed the former secretaries.

The commission is expected to quiz today, two other detained former ministers -- former health minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, and ex-state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

Replying to a question about quizzing the secretaries in connection with the Gatco case while the High Court (HC) had stayed the proceedings of the case, the ACC chairman said they moved to appeal the HC ruling and the investigation may go on until the matter is settled in the court.

Replying to a question regarding the new list of 80 corruption suspects published by the media, the ACC chairman said, "We will inform you about the new list after it is placed before us in the way it is supposed to be placed."

"I think our lawyers have proved before the court that in the current situation we may file cases under the Emergency Power Rules," the chairman said in reply to a question regarding the validity of different cases filed by the commission including the cases against Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia under the EPR.

"We will pursue the cases till the highest court, and the court will decide on the issues. Varied explanations have already been given by people on the issues," he quipped.

Replying to a question regarding submission of wealth statements by the advisers to the caretaker government, the ACC chairman said, "Anybody may submit a wealth statement if he or she wishes. We are asking for theirs, who are accused of corruption."

4 former, serving

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Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's political secretary Harris Chowdhury, Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Subhan and his son Shah Alam and 20 others in a graft case.

The four who surrendered yesterday and 21 others, including former housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas and former Rajuk director Humayun Khan, are accused of causing a loss of Tk 127.64 crore to the government exchequer. They allegedly sold 18 abandoned government houses at a low price.

Abbas and Humayun are now in jail. They were produced before the court yesterday during the hearing.

The ACC filed the case against Abbas and 11 others on May 29. The names of Harris, Amir Khasru and 11 others were later added in the charge sheet as investigation found their involvement in the case.

On September 20, ACC Assistant Director Khairul Huda submitted the charge sheet against Mirza Abbas, Amir Khasru, Harris, three former secretaries and a number of high officials of Rajuk and Public Works Department (PWD).

CASE AGAINST SQ CHY
ACC Deputy Director Moniruzzaman yesterday for the first time pressed charges against former BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury for concealing his wealth of over Tk 1.17 crore in the statement submitted to the commission on February 25.

Monir, who is also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), showing 47 people as prosecution witnesses.

On June 13, ACC Assistant Director SMM Akhter Hamid Bhuiyan filed the case with Ramna Police Station, accusing Salahuddin of hiding two cars valued over Tk 1.17 crore in his wealth statement.

According to the first information report (FIR), Salahuddin purchased a Range Rover (Chattro Metro-Gha-02-0010) in 1995 for Tk 24,98,740 using the duty-free car purchase privilege of lawmakers. In January 2003, he purchased a Lexus (Dhaka Metro-Bha-14-0096) through Leasing and Financial Services Ltd for Tk 92,48,400.

CASE AGAINST FIROZ
ACC Deputy Director Akhter Hossain, who is also the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet against Firoz Mahmud Iqbal with the CMM court yesterday in a case filed in connection with failing to submit the wealth statement within the ACC deadline.

The IO also played for the issuance of arrest warrant against Firoz.

On August 5, ACC Deputy Director Syed Iqbal Hossain filed the case with Ramna Police Station under section 26(2)(a) of

the ACC Act, 2004.

According to the FIR, the ACC sent a letter to Firoz on July 8 telling him to submit his wealth statement within seven working days.

The ACC extended the deadline by another seven days as Iqbal's wife Intiaz Begum applied for time extension on July 15. But, Firoz failed to submit his wealth statement within the extended time.

CASE AGAINST EX BANK OFFICIALS

ACC Assistant Director Rafiquzzaman, also the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet against five former officials of Oriental Bank Ltd., showing 14 people as prosecution witnesses.

The charge-sheeted accused are ex senior vice-president of Oriental Bank Shah Mohammad Harun, ex assistant vice-president Mohammad Fazlur Rahman, ex senior executive vice-president Mahmud Hossain, ex executive vice-president Kamrul Islam and former deputy managing director Imamul Haq.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrants against them, as they have been absconding since the case was filed against them.

ACC Assistant Director Abdul Latif filed the case against them with Motijheel Police Station on December 29 last year in connection with embezzling Tk 95 lakh from the principal office at Motijheel in the city.

The accused in collusion with others, submitting fake documents, drew the amount from the bank through six cheques on different dates and embezzled the money, the FIR said.

CASE AGAINST TANVIR

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday issued an arrest warrant against Tanvir Ahmed, son of detained former BNP lawmaker from Demra, Dhaka Salahuddin Ahmed, after National Board of Revenue (NBR) filed a tax evasion case.

Assistant Tax Commissioner Moniruzzaman of NBR filed the case saying Tanvir evaded Tk 30,20,411 of tax between 2005 and 2007.

CASE AGAINST FALU
The same court yesterday fixed October 4 for the next hearing of a case filed in connection with embezzlement of government relief materials by now detained former BNP lawmaker Mossaddak Ali Falu and 15 others.

On September 17, ACC Assistant Director Sheikh Abdus Salam submitted the charge sheet against Falu, four Dhaka City Corporation ward commissioners and 11 others.

Of them, Falu, Anwar Hossain, headmaster of Tejaon Community Centre Adarsha High School and Nazir Ahmed, MLSS of DCC Ward-37, are now in jail.

On March 2, security personnel recovered 605 corrugated iron sheets and 63 blankets meant for relief at Ruhul Amin's office in Tejaon.

Hasina

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mer premier is mentally strong and not worried about the cases filed against her.

She yesterday said she feels bad thinking about the poor leading their lives amid high price of essentials.

"I am physically alright, but I feel bad whenever I think about the poor leading their lives at a time when prices of essentials are so high," advocate Khandaker Moniruzzaman, Hasina's lawyer, quoted the AL chief as saying.

Former premier Sheikh Hasina was arrested on July 16 and since then she has been kept at the sub-jail on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan premises.

KOKO'S WIFE MEETS KHALEDA
Samila Rahman met her mother-in-law Khaleda Zia at the sub-jail yesterday.

During the 55-minute meeting, from 4:20pm, Khaleda inquired about the health of Koko, sub-jail sources said. She also inquired about other family members as well.

Deputy Inspector General (prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique told The Daily Star yesterday that there was permission for two others -- Zubaida Khan Rahman, wife of Khaleda's elder son Tarique Rahman and wife of an elder brother of Ziaur Rahman -- to meet Khaleda, but they did not show up.

Khaleda Zia is in a sub-jail at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan premises since she was arrested with her younger son Koko on September 3.

Sohel, Salman

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he alleged that the accused showed 151.51 acres of Gazipur land as security for the loan, though the lands belonged to the government and locals.

The former bank officials have been made accused as they provided the loan without checking the documents that later turned out to be forged.

Earlier on Sunday, the anti-graft body filed a case against exchange director of Shineeupur Holdings Ltd Mahmudur Rahman, its chairman Soheli F Rahman, Vice-Chairman Salman F Rahman and four others for defrauding Sonali Bank of over Tk 108 crore.

Our CU Correspondent reports: ACC yesterday pressed charges against former Jamaat lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury of concealing information in his wealth statement and former foreign minister M Morshed Khan's son Faisal Morshed Khan for abetting him in the act.

ACC Deputy Director Mohammad Jahangir Alam submitted the charge sheet to Metropolitan Magistrate AKM Shahidur Rahman Akand.

Earlier on July 1, another deputy director, Abul Kalam Azad, filed the case with city's Bandar Police Station.

Shahjahan Chowdhury in his wealth statement submitted on February 20 claimed that he had property worth Tk 2.41 lakh while an ACC investigation found it to be valued at Tk 3.41 lakh.

Besides, a sport utility vehicle worth Tk 1.5 crore was seized from his possession.

According to the charge sheet, Faisal Morshed, managing director of the Pacific Motors, helped Shahjahan to open a current bank account with the AB Bank Mohakhali branch.

Court accepts

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them notices to surrender by October 4.

Nurunnabi, a businessman from Durgapur upazila, filed the case on August 6 against six people for extorting Tk 1 crore from him at gunpoint over a deal of Jamuna Seed Cold Storage Private Limited.

The court also accepted the charge sheet against Lutfar in another case for extorting Tk 30 lakh from the same businessman.

LDP now Bikolpa

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government. And for this, party workers wanted restoring the name Bikolpa Dhara," it added.

Badruddoza had formed Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh on March 10, 2004 and abolished the party to form the LDP on October 26, 2006 with Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed and several other BNP leaders who had left the BNP.

The (LDP) split only eight months after its formation due to disputes between party president Badruddoza and executive president Oli Ahmed.

Announcing formation of a new party presidium, Badruddoza said Oli Ahmed, former speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali and 11 others were no longer in the party.

And Oli Ahmed claimed he had majority support in the party with 12 of the 15 presidium members backing him.

British foreign

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electoral reform and the voter list, and the UK's support for Bangladesh's commitment to a roadmap for elections before the end of 2008," the press release said.

He will visit Sylhet division to meet the members of British-Bangladesh community there.

DU violence

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August 25 to investigate the violence on DU campus and was given 15 working days to submit its report. Later, the time was extended by 20 working days following the commission's appeal.

Meanwhile, Prof Harun-or-Rashid, Prof Nim Chandra Bhoomik and student leader Azizul Bari Helal, who were detained on charge of instigating campus violence were produced before the commission yesterday.

They were, however, not allowed to talk to the media.

After the testimony sessions of the detained persons were over, Justice Habibur briefed the new persons.

Justice Habibur quoted Prof Harun-or-Rashid, dean of Faculty of Social Sciences at DU, as saying that he was present both at the general and executive meetings of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta).

Data members as a body are responsible for the decision of expressing solidarity with the students' demands, Prof Harun said.

Regarding students' participation in the Duta-organised procession from Aparajevo Bangla to Central Shaheed Minar, he said, "it was not possible for the teachers to stop students' participation in the

procession."

Justice Habibur said that Prof Nim Chandra Bhoomik denied all charges against him.

Regarding Jatiyatabdi Chhatra Dal (JCD) President Azizul Bari Helal, Justice Habibur said that he was not present on campus during violence. Although his name was not included in the first information report, he was shown arrested in another case later on, Justice Habibur said. The commission would check how Helal was involved with the incident, he added.

With the three, a total of 86 people gave their accounts of the incident so far to the commission.

Eminent academic Prof Sirajul Islam will meet the commission tomorrow while DU Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz and former adviser to caretaker government Sultana Kamal will meet the commission on Thursday, commission sources said.

ACC appeals

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stayed proceedings of the GATCO scam case. The court had also issued a rule upon the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) to explain why the case placing under the Emergency Power Rule should not be declared illegal.

CEC urges

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the entire task of preparing the voter list with photographs will be completed in October next year so that the election may be held by the end of 2008.

After announcing the roadmap, the CEC also announced that the parliamentary election may be held earlier than the deadline set if the voter list is ready before the stipulated time.

"We have a timeline for preparing the fresh voter list, which will not be exceeded by any means," Huda added.

The work of preparing the voter list did not stop despite the storms and the massive flood, as the people helped the EC, said the CEC.

"Ten percent of the total work of preparing the voter list has already been completed in September, making us very hopeful," Huda said.

Regarding the demand of some political parties for cancelling the election symbol -- scale, the CEC said that is a very difficult and complicated question for the EC.

With Tangail Deputy Commissioner (DC) Akhter Ali Sarkar in the chair, the meeting was attended by Maj Gen Muzahiduddin, GOC of Ghatail Cantonment, Commander of the 98th Composite Brigade Brig Gen Osman Gani, Tangail Superintendent of Police (SP) Abdul Mannan, and District Election Officer Abdul Wadud, among others.

Senior officials of the local administration, election officials, and representatives of different professions and NGOs were also present.

The work of field level data collection through door-to-door visits in Tangail municipal area will start on October 6 while the work of data entry and voter registration with photographs is scheduled to begin on October 22, sources in District Election Office said.

Meanwhile, our Barisal correspondent reported that Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain yesterday at a views exchange meeting in Barisal Auditorium ahead of the beginning of voter listing in the local city corporation area, said the over due elections to city corporations will be held first after having the voter list ready, giving priority to Barisal and Rajshahi city corporations.

Regarding the allegation that the EC is trying to control political parties through importing a provision of mandatory party registration, Sakawat said the commission has no intention of controlling the parties. "We are not interested in controlling the parties. But we are determined to eliminate the influence of black money and muscle in elections at any cost," he asserted.

The exchange of views was presided over by Manjure Elahi, deputy commissioner of Barisal, while it was also addressed as special guests by Delwar Hussein Dilu, ward commissioner and the mayor-in-charge of Barisal City Corporation, and Lt Col Abu Sayeed Muhammad Ali, commander of the district joint forces.

Mad rush for tickets

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buying tickets for October 8 or any date before that.

The bus companies at Mohakhali terminal did not issue any advance tickets until yesterday.

Manly Mymensingh, Netrakona, Jamalpur, and Bogra-bound buses start from Mohakhali. Law enforcers today have a meeting with bus owner associations to facilitate ticket sale to help passengers.

LAUNCH TICKETS
Cabin tickets of most of the launches scheduled to set sail on October 10-12 were sold out on the very first day, staffs and managers of different services said yesterday.

Besides this, launch authorities allegedly demanded extra fare for cabins from the passengers.

Passengers who came to book advanced tickets claimed launch authorities created artificial ticket crisis to manipulate prices.

They also claimed tickets are available in black market.

"We usually sell tickets (cabin-single) at Tk 600; now we are selling those at Tk 1,000," said Lokman, a staff of MV Sadia, a Barguna-bound launch, as this correspondent posing as a passenger wanted to buy a ticket.

Fares of double-cabin have also increased, Lokman said.

Another staff of Amtoli-bound launch MV Paira-3 said tickets are available but the prices are higher than usual rate.

Staffs of Ghoserhat-bound MV Jamal-2 said there is no cabin ticket for October 9-12. They also admitted that fares of cabin (single-double) are much higher.

Leaders of Bangladesh Inland Water Ways Association denied the allegation of increasing fares.

"Instead of increasing fares, we are giving 10 percent concession on deck fares," Siddiqui Rahman Patwary, secretary of the Association, told The Daily Star at his Paltan office yesterday.

"If you give any evidence of taking extra fare, we will take stern

US weighs

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operation inside Iran, the pace of attack planning has increased markedly and the CIA has dramatically expanded a unit focusing on Iran, it said.

The amended plan would call for using the US Navy's "sea-launched cruise missiles and more precisely targeted ground attacks and bombing strikes, including plans to destroy the most important Revolutionary Guard training camps, supply depots, and command and control facilities," it said.

Vice President Dick Cheney was pushing to confront the Iranians despite deep concerns from Republicans that any action could be politically disastrous for the party given popular opposition to the Iraq war, a former intelligence official said.

"There is a desperate effort by Cheney et al. to bring military action to Iran as soon as possible," the official said. "Meanwhile, the politicians are saying, 'You can't do it, because every Republican is going to be defeated, and we're only one fact away from going over the cliff in Iraq.'"

Bush and his advisers have adopted the new "counter-terrorism" approach recognizing the US public is not convinced that Iran poses an imminent nuclear threat and that the US intelligence community believes Tehran is at least five years away from obtaining an atomic bomb.

But officials are betting the case for hitting Iranian forces blamed for attacking US soldiers would be easier to make, the magazine wrote.

"This time, unlike the attack in Iraq, we're going to play the victim. The name of our game seems to be to get the Iranians to overplay their hand," said Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former national security adviser under ex-president Jimmy Carter and a critic of the Bush administration's foreign policy.

Brzezinski said that Iran would probably respond to a US attack "by intensifying the conflict in Iraq and also in Afghanistan, their neighbours, and that could draw in Pakistan."

"We will be stuck in a regional war for twenty years," he said.

The magazine quoted a Defence Department spokesman saying the administration remains committed to a diplomatic solution to disputes with Iran.

Delwar

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Mannan Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain from the party just before her arrest on September 03.

Meanwhile, Delwar also urged authorities to release Khaleda and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina so that an environment for election and democracy may be created.

"Atmosphere for fair politics would be created after withdrawal of the state of emergency as well as the ban on politics," he said.

He said they have got initial justice as the High Court granted bail for Khaleda and all confusions will be over if she is freed.

They could not do anything without holding discussions among party leaders, as Khaleda did not do anything without consultation, he added.

Graft cases

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accused of accumulating wealth worth over Tk 4.82 crore through illegal means and keeping back information of properties worth over Tk 4.23 crore.

ACC Deputy Director Jahirul Huda on September 26 filed the case against him, his wife Dr Zubaida Rahman and mother-in-law Iqbal Mand Banu for withholding wealth information.

Zubaida and her mother were charged with aiding and abetting him in attempts to show that his was legal income.

ACC Deputy Assistant Director Shariful Haque Siddiqui filed the case against Moudud with the Gulshan Police Station on September 16.

According to the first information report, the BNP standing committee member did not declare wealth worth Tk 4.40 crore. He has assets to the tune of Tk 7.38 crore which is disproportionate to his sources of income.

ACC Assistant Director Talebur Rahman sued the Huda couple on July 11 for discrepancies between their actual wealth and the statements they had submitted to the anti-graft body.

The two are also accused of concealing information of wealth worth over Tk 2.19 crore.

Tk 5,213cr

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who disclosed Tk 142 crore. Besides, it received Tk 9 crore in taxes from 586 people from the central tax survey zone, who legalised Tk 72 crore.

The opportunity was granted on June 5 for people who earned money legally and did not disclose that for various reasons.

The previous time limit for availing this opportunity was July 31 but the NBR extended it following requests from different sections of people.

Taking this opportunity, some top political personalities including former prime minister Khaleda Zia and former finance minister M Saifur Rahman declared their undisclosed earnings. Some business tycoons also disclosed.

Thai coup gen quits

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prime minister and oversee internal security, amid speculation that he is eyeing the premiership.

Sonthi seized power in the coup in September 2006, which toppled the twice-elected government of prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and installed former army chief Surayud Chulanont as premier.

The announcement that Sonthi was stepping down as the junta leader cemented his transition out of the military and into politics.

The general, who was the first Muslim to lead the army in this mainly Buddhist nation, accepted mandatory retirement from the army on Sunday.

He had earlier said that he would remain as junta chief until after national elections set for December 23.

His resignation Monday will only fuel speculation about the political ambitions of a man who has refused to rule out the possibility that he would seek the premiership for himself.

Sonthi earlier acknowledged that

not everyone is happy about the changes within the army, after he handed command of the troops to General Anupong Paojinda.

A small bomb exploded late Sunday in a phone booth near the army headquarters in central Bangkok, wounding two police bomb experts.

Sonthi said he believed the blast was politically motivated, and meant as a challenge to the new army leadership.

"They want to challenge the new person in charge," Sonthi told Thai television.

"There is a group of people who really want to taste power and to remind the public that they still exist," he said.

Police said the bomb was similar to several other mysterious blasts that have hit Bangkok since the military seized power in last year's bloodless coup, including deadly blasts on New Year's Eve that killed three people.

No one has been arrested or charged in connection with any of the blasts, nor has anybody claimed responsibility.

Burqa-clad bomber

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They had beefed up security at all checkpoints and the vehicle carrying the bomber was intercepted as a result, but the attacker blew himself up before they could check it, one source said.

Chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad confirmed that it was a suicide blast but dismissed earlier witness reports that the bombing targeted a military convoy passing through the town.

In a separate incident Islamic militants shot dead a paramilitary soldier before dawn in North Waziristan, the most conflict-hit of Pakistan's tribal zones, security officials said.

The rebels raided a checkpoint in the border town of Datta Khel and fled in darkness after shooting the trooper, apparently using a gun fitted with a silencer, one official said.

Nearly 300 people have died in attacks in Pakistan blamed on Islamic militants, most of them suicide bombings, since the Red Mosque raid. Most of the attacks have targeted Pakistani security forces.

The mosque standoff also coincided with the breakdown of a controversial peace deal between the government and Islamic militants in the tribal