

Property of ex-MP Mirza Azam to be attached

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered attachment of property of former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Mirza Azam and a businessman in a graft case.

The same court, meantime, directed the authorities to publish summons in two national Bangla dailies asking Harris Chowdhury, Orion Group Chairman Obaidul Karim and Sharin Islam Tuhin, nephew of Khaleda Zia, to turn themselves in by December 10 in two cases that were filed for bribery and tax evasion.

AZAM CASE
Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque at Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the attachment order after receiving police reports on arrest warrants the court issued against Azam and Mohammad Ali Khokon, a proprietor director of Metro Spinning Ltd, on November 27.

The High Court earlier stayed the trial proceedings against another accused in the case, Shawkat Ali, also a proprietor director of the spinning mill. The HC also granted him bail until submission of police report on his arrest warrant.

INVESTIGATION OFFICER
Mohammad Monaim Hossain, who is also an assistant director at Anti-Corruption Commission, submitted charge sheet against the three men to Dhaka's chief metropolitan magistrate's court on November 20, showing 23 people as prosecution witnesses.

A Rab team recovered a Lexus sport utility vehicle on March 9 from the residence of Shawkat Ali on road No. 113 at Gulshan-2 in the city. The law enforcers later discovered that Azam, also the general secretary of Awami Juba League, was the original owner of the luxury vehicle.

Sub-Inspector Shawkat Kabir of Rab laid a case with Gulshan Police Station against Azam and the two others the following day.

The complainant said Azam, a corruption suspect, on Nov. 20, 2003, imported the tax-free Lexus on March 25, 2003 and sold it to Shawkat, preparing fake documents.

HARRIS-OBAIDUL
The same court ordered the authorities to publish summons in newspapers after receiving reports on the arrest warrants and attachment orders it issued against Harris Chowdhury and Obaidul Karim in a bribery case that was filed for gross anomalies in Gulistan-Jatrabari flyer contract.

Former BNP lawmaker Ashraf Hossain and Harris's brother-in-law Masud Ahmed and his driver Abdus Salam are also accused in the case and are now behind bars.

The investigation officer submitted charge sheet against the five to chief metropolitan magistrate's court on November 14, showing 27 people as prosecution witnesses.

The charge sheet mentioned that an Infiniti sport utility vehicle was imported duty-free using Ashraf's privilege as a lawmaker though the documents of the vehicle bore Karim's address.

Karim paid around Tk 50 lakh for the SUV while its market value was much higher, said the charge sheet adding that the Orion chairman bribed Harris with the vehicle in order to get work order for the Jatrabari-Gulistan flyer.

The charge sheet said Ashraf, for financial gains, breached his affidavit by transferring the car to Karim.

On June 5, Sub-Inspector Mohammad Abdul Hye filed the

Mainul clarifies

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challenge, let him do it," he told reporters in response to allegations from Sheikh Hasina's lawyers that the venue of the Sessions Court was changed unlawfully.

Hasina was brought to the court in the parliament building complex on Monday and put in the dock to face a Tk 3-crore extortion case filed against her by Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of East Coast Private Ltd.

Asked about establishment of an independent secretariat of the Supreme Court following the separation of the judiciary from the executive control on November 1, the adviser said it will take time to set up a separate secretariat.

However, he said although the law ministry is doing the secretarial work for the Supreme Court, all decisions regarding the judiciary are being taken by the Supreme Court.

The law ministry will continue doing the secretarial job until a new secretariat is established.

case with Dhanmondi Police Station.

TUHIN CASE

The court also ordered the authorities to publish summons against Tuhin in newspapers after receiving report on the property-attachment order it earlier issued against him.

On November 25, Deputy Commissioner (Taxes) Golam Kabir at National Board of Revenue filed the case against him for allegedly evading Tk 8.18 lakh in tax between 1998 and 2007 and concealing Tk 3.29 crore in his wealth information submitted to the revenue board.

The court later issued arrest warrant against him, asking him to appear before the court on November 29. Tuhin, however, failed to comply, prompting the court to attach his property.

Israel to build homes in east Jerusalem

AP, Jerusalem

Israel said yesterday it is seeking bids to build more than 300 new homes in a disputed east Jerusalem neighborhood, drawing Palestinian condemnations that the move is undermining the newly revived peace talks held last week in Annapolis, Md.

A Housing Ministry spokesman said 307 units would be built in Har Homa, a Jewish neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

Israel captured the eastern part of the city in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed the area. The Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their state.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said he sent an urgent message to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, asking her to block the project from moving forward.

"This is undermining Annapolis," he said, referring to the U.S.-hosted summit, where Israel and the Palestinians relaunched peace talks.

The two sides agreed to base their peace talks on the U.S.-backed "road map," a peace plan that calls on Israel to halt all settlement construction.

The Palestinians consider any construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem to be settlement activity. Israel says the settlement freeze does not apply to Jerusalem.

"Israel makes a clear distinction between the West Bank and Jerusalem," said Mark Regev, spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. "Israel has never made a commitment to limit our sovereignty in Jerusalem. Implementation of the first phase of the road map does not apply to Jerusalem."

Meanwhile, Israel's defense minister said it is time to "kill those who carry out attacks" against Israelis, but said he was holding off on a wide-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip for now.

In a rare interview, Defense Minister Ehud Barak also rejected calls from some members of his Labor Party to talk to Gaza's Islamic Hamas rulers, telling Army Radio that Israeli troops had killed 27 Gaza militants in the past 10 days and would continue to aggressively chase down those operating under Hamas' watch.

"I do not agree with the assessment that the time has come to talk to the Hamas. Now is the time to kill those who carry out attacks and those firing Qassams (rockets) and mortars," Barak said.

Early Tuesday, an Israeli airstrike on a Hamas police post in central Gaza killed three militants and wounded a fourth. Hamas and Palestinian medical officials said, The army confirmed the attack.

Barak, a former military chief, has repeatedly hinted that Israel was on the verge of invading Gaza to stop the nearly daily rocket fire at towns in southern Israel.

Analysts have speculated that Barak wanted to wait until the conclusion of the Annapolis conference. But when asked about the army's plans, Barak ruled out an immediate broad operation.

"The moment has not arrived yet and I hope that it does not arrive, but it is true that we are preparing and need to prepare for a wide range of possibilities," he said. "Everyday that passes, we get closer to a wide-scale operation in Gaza, but we are not eager for it."

Hamas, an Islamic militant group committed to Israel's destruction, took control of Gaza in June after overrunning the rival Fatah forces of moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel has tried to bolster Abbas, who now rules from the West Bank, and isolate Hamas. But Israeli airstrikes and pinpoint ground operations have failed to halt the rocket and mortar fire from Gaza, which have severely disrupted life in southern Israel. While smaller groups have fired most of the rockets, Israel holds Hamas responsible for the attacks.

Delwar

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leaders and workers however believe that the party is united under the leadership of Khaleda Zia and Khandaker Delwar Hossain," Rizvi Ahmed said.

Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, member of BNP standing committee and a pro-Saifur leader, rejected the allegation saying that there is no scope for pressurising any leader in the party. The ones raising such allegations are suffering from infidelity complex, he added.

"Unity is a must in the party and we sent the message to them [leaders loyal to Delwar] -- to which they responded positively," Mahbub told The Daily Star last night.

Discussion is on to bring unity in the party and senior leaders from both sides are talking with each other through different channels," he added.

On Saturday, Saifur Rahman talked with Delwar Hossain over the phone and made a proposal to unite the party. Delwar in response told Saifur that the proposal could be considered if the pro-Saifur committee is cancelled and Khaleda's decision to expel Mannan Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain from the party is accepted.

Delwar also requested Saifur to speak with detailed party chief Khaleda regarding the proposal as he would accept any decision taken by her.

Earlier, following the BNP standing committee meeting on October 29 held at Saifur Rahman's Gulshan residence, Delwar alleged that he had been threatened with death by a certain quarter if he did not attend the meeting. He also claimed that he was forcefully ousted from the post of secretary general of BNP.

Public opinion

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regulation should go on website for public opinion before gazette notification.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Adviser Fakhrul Islam emphasised carrying out reform of the rules and regulations "on priority basis".

Thanking them for taking the challenge of doing this important task, the chief adviser directed the establishment ministry to take steps to make the two proposals effective.

It was disclosed that a task force on simplification of land-related rules and regulations, headed by RRC member Muyeed Chowdhury, would be formed.

The RRC proposals were made during its first meeting after its formation on October 30.

JMB Men

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admitted being the mastermind while Rongli made duplicate keys to break out of jail.

But the committee is not satisfied with their statements, Haider added.

He said, "The prisoners will be tested whether they can make duplicate keys. If they fail, we'll investigate whether anyone from inside or outside provided them with the keys."

Meanwhile, the two-member committee is also going to submit its report mentioning negligence of the jail authorities.

Sources said the committee has found involvement of some officials and employees. It is going to submit a report with some recommendations including punitive measures against the superintendent and the jailer of Comilla Jail.

Sundarbans

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their primary assessment around Tk 1,020 crore. Leaves have been stripped from trees and most of the larger trees have either been blown down or have lost many branches while some were just wiped out by the tidal surge. Most of the structures including offices and quarters of the forest officials also have been destroyed.

On Friday, Marc Patry, programme specialist for natural heritage at Unesco World Heritage Centre (WHC) in Paris, made a day-long inspection of a few badly-hit spots by boat, to assess the impact of Sidr on the Sundarbans.

Patry also met Md. Nasir, country Director of UNDP Bangladesh, and Stefan Frowein, ambassador of the European Commission in Bangladesh yesterday, apprising them of the devastation and requesting their engagement in the rehabilitation process of the Sundarbans.

"Though alleviating human sufferings caused by the cyclone is naturally the top priority for international support, the salvation of the Sundarbans is also of great importance as several lakh people depend on the forest resources for their livelihood. This is the message I tried to get across during my meeting with the multilateral and bilateral donors," said Patry in a news release issued from Unesco Dhaka yesterday.

The WHC fund is meant for re-establishing the forest department's management capacity of the Sundarbans. The forest department which manages the Sundarbans world heritage site, through 97 stations and about 1,100 strong staff, has lost most of its infrastructure and communication equipment in the cyclone.

The Sundarbans are not just a natural heritage site worth conservation for the benefit of mankind, but thousands of people earn their livelihood through fishing in the waters inside the forest and by collecting honey, Patry pointed out, according to the news release.

Maj Gen (retd) Ibrahim

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latest in a series formed during the state of emergency.

Formation of the party was announced and its draft constitution released at a crowded press conference at a city hotel.

Meanwhile, the constitutions of BNP and Jatiya Party, formed by military rulers Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad, are now being criticised severely due to absolute power of party chief to control party activities without regard for intra-party democratic practices.

Ibrahim said, "The full committee of the party will be announced within four to five weeks. We will make preparations to contest the next parliamentary election."

He went on, "We want politics of reconciliation, coordination and cooperation on such matters which have divided the people. We want politics of change. We have to move forward by introducing accountability and transparency in politics."

Bangladesh Welfare Party is based on five principles - nationalism, democracy, social justice, economic development and humanism. Everybody - except war criminals, people who had opposed the Liberation War, and corrupt ones - are welcome to the party, said Ibrahim, a veteran freedom fighter.

Responding to a query, he said his party would never compromise with war criminals and corrupt people.

The retired general portrayed a gloomy picture of country's present political situation saying it is hampering desired development of the country.

"The months of October, November and December of 2006 were very crucial in our national life ... The nation was passing through a very difficult situation because of confrontational politics of the major parties," he said.

"To save the nation, the people and the armed forces had to take a joint decision. And they implemented the decision on the 11th of the first month of 2007 ... That is why I feel that 'one-eleven' has given us an opportunity to re-start life," Ibrahim observed.

Ibrahim, who was retired following a chaotic situation in the army in 1996, said many former military and civil high officials and freedom fighters have contacted him to join the new party.

"No secret accords have been signed with leaders of any political parties over joining his party," he said, replying to questions.

Ibrahim pointed out that the new party has no intention of being rivals of major parties like Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party. "We want to be complementary to them. And we hope that the big parties would also consider us as complementary to them in building a prosperous Bangladesh," he asserted.

His party recognises Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Sheikh

Pak opposition

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Sharif told a joint news conference with Benazir late Monday following the talks at her Islamabad home that "in the present circumstances free, fair and transparent elections seem impossible."

He added that he would not be discouraged by the fact that election authorities had rejected his nomination paper earlier Monday.

Benazir said the charter of demands was a "major confidence-building step" between the two opposition parties.

It was the first meeting between the former rivals, who each had two terms in power between 1988 and 1999, since they both returned home from years in exile to rejoin the political calychehere.

However the announcement appears to be something of a compromise between Benazir, who earlier said her party would take part in the polls under protest, and Sharif, who pledged a boycott no matter what.

It will also leave them both space to wriggle out should they decide to forge a separate path, amid reports that both leaders could reach some sort of understanding with the embattled Musharraf.

Under massive international pressure following his declaration of emergency rule, Musharraf has delivered significant concessions to the opposition in recent weeks.

It will be army chief last week and was sworn in for a second term as a civilian president, ending eight years of military rule after he seized power in a coup in 1999.

Held teachers

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assurances from the government about the release of the detained teachers and students.

When asked about the people arrested outside the campus the VC said, "We have nothing to do with those who were arrested in connection with the incidents that took place outside the campus."

NEW PARTIES

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A number of new political parties were floated since imposition of the state of emergency on January 11, suspending the ninth parliamentary elections.

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