

Tarique, Babar

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cognisance and beginning the trial. Of those accused, Tarique, also the senior joint secretary general of BNP Babar and Sufian are behind bars while the others are still at large.

Though detained on other charges, the three were later shown arrested in the case.

The IO said the accused should be brought to trial as the charges against them have been proved primarily. He appealed the court to issue warrants for the arrest of those on the run and order attachment of their properties.

On October 4 last year, ACC Deputy Assistant Director Abul Kashem filed the bribery case with Ramna Police Station, accusing six including Babar.

Tarique and Saleemul were named as the other two defendants after investigation found their involvement.

The ACC approved the charge sheet on April 23. The charges were made under sections 161, 165 and 165(kha) of the penal code and 5(2) of Prevention of Corruption Act 1947.

Out of the Tk 21 crore bribe given by Shah Alam, Tarique had received Tk 1 crore in cash, according to case details.

Babar was paid Tk 6 crore in cash and Tk 14 crore in cheques and pay orders. He had deposited the money in an account with the Prime Bank.

Saleemul Huq, who was the chairman of the bank at that time, was charged with keeping the ill-gotten money in his account and drawing Tk 88 lakh as interest against the sum.

Babar received the amount at different times between August 7 and September 13, 2006.

Abu Sufian arranged meetings between Babar, Tarique and Shah Alam at Babar's official residence on Bailey Road on August 7 and 8.

At first, Babar had demanded Tk 100 crore to spare the Bashundhara Group chairman's son from facing murder charges. But after negotiations, the amount was fixed at Tk 50 crore.

Duke of Gloucester

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yesterday that the visit by Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester will focus on the UK's continuing and wide-ranging commitments to long-term development in Bangladesh.

This included particular contributions to disaster management and relief and reconstruction projects in southern Bangladesh following the devastating 2007 floods and Cyclone Sidr.

During the visit, Prince Richard will also call on the President Prof Dr Iajuddin Ahmed.

"We are absolutely delighted to welcome His Royal Highness. His visit demonstrates the importance the UK attaches to people-to-people links with Bangladesh, these links are the bedrock of friendship between our countries," said British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury in a statement ahead of the visit.

The royal visit, coming shortly after trips by three cabinet ministers in just four months, further underlines the strong bilateral relationship between UK and Bangladesh.

Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, is the second son of the late Duke of Gloucester and the late Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester. He is a grandson of George V and a first cousin to the Queen.

Bibiyan power

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Since the government decided to push forward some large power projects last year, IFC of the World Bank put pressure on the government to prioritise Bibiyana power project over all other projects, prompting the government to do so.

The government move surprised all power sector players, since Bibiyana power project had no allocated land or power infrastructure to begin with, while Sirajganj and Meghnaghat-3 power projects had the primary infrastructures ready.

Bibiyan gas field was discovered in 1998 by a US company, Unocal, which was later acquired by Chevron. Since the discovery, Unocal was pushing for exporting Bibiyana's gas, saying there was not enough market for gas in Bangladesh.

However, as a gas crisis in the country started to emerge, Chevron developed the field from 2004, and from last year started supplying about 240 million cubic feet of gas a day (mncfd), while its supplying capacity is more than 500 mncfd.

A lack of gas supply pipeline would not allow Chevron to supply in its full capacity until 2010, making it so eager to have Bibiyana power project that the company itself participated in the bid.

Chevron is known for participating in power tenders very selectively, and this is its first such bidding in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Power Cell upheld its decision to exclude Summit Industrial and Mercantile Corporation from biddings for Bibiyana and Sirajganj power projects, responding to an appeal from the company for reconsidering its inclusion.

Summit felt that it had been unjustly pushed out of the competition by an arbitrary evaluation by IFC. IFC calculated the net value of Summit at only 35 million US dollars, while the auditor's report submitted to the Power Cell put the figure at 120 million dollars. The auditor SF Ahmed & Co was nominated by the Power Cell itself.

However on April 27, the Power Cell upheld IFC's evaluation by presenting a certificate by Acnabin, a chartered accounting firm, stating that Summit's net worth is 32.75 million dollars, though Acnabin was not in the list of auditors of the Power Cell for the bid.

A few days later, Shah Alam sent Tk 1 crore to Tarique via Apu. Payments of the remaining Tk 20 crore were made through Sufian.

The transaction, however, was stopped with the changeover of government in October, 2006.

Then after the present caretaker government launched the anti-graft drive, Saleemul had tried to get off the hook by surrendering the money to the national exchequer.

Tarique was arrested on March 7 last year on extortion charges. Besides yesterday's, formal charges have been laid against him for extortion, amassing assets illegally and concealing wealth information to the ACC.

Babar was arrested on May 29 last year and was later convicted of possessing illegal firearms and ammunition. He was shown arrested also in a case filed for making a fortune through illegal means.

NIKO CASE
The Niko graft case against detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia, former law minister Moudud Ahmed and nine others might be sent today to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court in Dhaka for trial.

Muggers

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"As Giasuddin and another employee Mofazzel Hossain Titu tried to resist, they stabbed Giasuddin in the throat and Mofazzel in a hand," Alauddin told The Daily Star.

He said the other two snatchers kept employees Mahmudul Hasan and Sultan Hossain at gunpoint.

Giasuddin and Mofazzel were later rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where they were given treatment.

Witnesses said as the employees raised alarm, pedestrians on the busy road chased them causing one of their motorbikes to fall down. Two muggers on the motorbike exploded a bomb and fired two shots in the air to avert capture.

They fled the scene as one of their gang members appeared on another motorbike and rode away with them.

Angry locals later set fire to the motorbike the muggers left behind.

Alauddin said the spot was less than 50 yards from Lalbagh Police Station but no policeman came forward even after hearing gunshots and the bomb explosion.

"Police came to the spot after we had called them over telephone," Alauddin said.

Alauddin filed a case with Lalbagh Police Station in the afternoon accusing six unidentified people of snatching the money.

Advisers

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adding that they are now completing the "final preparations" for the formal dialogue with political parties.

LCRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal and Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif also attended the meeting.

The overriding aim of the dialogue must be to move towards an acceptable well-participated election inevitable within the stipulated time, Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said while talking to The Daily Star last night.

"One of the preconditions for a fruitful dialogue is taking into account the existing political reality. You cannot have a tailor-made good democracy overnight, but a beginning can be had by creating consensus about norms of democratic practices and behaviours," he said.

Ultimately, it is the political leaders who will have to carry out the reforms and they will have to reach consensus among themselves about how to make democracy sustainable, the former adviser said adding that citizens' groups can only play a supporting role through mobilising public opinion.

Even though the government is contemplating inviting an independent rapporteur to the formal dialogue, it may step back considering the parties in the dialogue may feel uneasy as many sensitive issues will come up.

CONSULTATION WITH EXPERTS
The government is considering seeking advice time to time from eminent citizens who are experts in their respective fields like strengthening democracy, holding elections, and constitutional and economic issues.

"Since this [caretaker government] is an unelected government, it has no other means to assess public opinion or receive their suggestions," a well-placed source told The Daily Star yesterday.

Such consultation will take place as and when necessary, the source added.

OC, SI punished

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Jahan to commit suicide.

SI Nizamuddin of Adabar police told The Daily Star, "The actions were taken against the two in connection with rape and suicide of a garment worker."

Family sources said that after being raped by a gang on April 25, Nur Jahan had to marry one Rajib on insistence of the two policemen.

But later, as Rajib refused to accept her as wife, she took poison and died on April 27.

US coordinator

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US State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism to Bangladesh, underscoring the growing importance of cooperation between the two nations in this area.

According to the US embassy officials in Dhaka, during his two-day visit Ambassador Dailey will meet senior government officials on issues related to counterterrorism and US-Bangladesh cooperation on the global war on terror.

They said Bangladesh has become a valuable US ally in the global war on terror. As part of the war effort, the Bangladesh government has begun to address problems of money laundering and weak border controls to ensure that Bangladesh does not become a terrorist safe haven.

During the meeting with high officials, Ambassador Dailey is likely to pursue them to pass a series of amendments that would strengthen Bangladesh's Anti-Money Laundering Act and also create a draft for an Anti-Terrorism Act.

The legislation would help Bangladesh enter Egmont, the international body of Financial Intelligence Units that plays a critical role in fighting terror financing, they add.

The issue of counterterrorism cooperation between India and Bangladesh is also likely to come up for discussion.

The United States has launched a US\$20 million, five-year anti-corruption programme in Bangladesh to further transparency and good governance efforts both necessary foundations for counterterrorism activities.

CA apprises

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according to the roadmap announced earlier by the Election Commission," said the press secretary.

President Iajuddin gave a patient hearing to the chief adviser and expressed his satisfaction at the government steps towards holding the general election by December this year.

He also expressed satisfaction as the government successfully faced the challenge of food problem and suggested that "the food-grain stock should be increased further."

Both the president and the chief adviser expressed their gratitude to Allah for saving Bangladesh from devastation by cyclone Nargis.

Military Secretary to the President Major General Mohd Aminul Karim, Secretary of the President's Office Md Sirajul Islam, CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim and President's Press Secretary Abdul Awal Howlader were present during the meeting.

45 injured

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According to police and local sources, the clash broke out at around 10:00 am when a bus worker misbehaved with a teacher of Sirajganj Polytechnic Institute over bus fare.

Enraged at the news, over a hundred students of the institute took position at the Polytechnic intersection and barricaded Sirajganj-Kazipur Road.

The transport workers then dashed towards the intersection in several buses and locked in a fierce clash with the students.

During the clash that raged on for about two hours, scores sustained injuries, a bus was torched and six more were vandalised while the students and the transport workers pelted bricks and chased each other.

Fire fighters from Sirajganj Fire Station swiftly reached the spot and doused the fire in an hour.

Members of Sirajganj police and the Rapid Action Battalion charged batons on the two clashing groups to bring the situation under control, said police sources.

Vehicular movement on the road came to a standstill during the fight and the situation remained unchanged till filing of this report yesterday afternoon.

The situation in the area was tense and additional police were deployed to avert further untoward incident.

Delwar

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Nam flat in the city.

All the cases against political leaders, including Khaleda Zia, are filed with an ill motive to disqualify them from contesting the elections, but the people will not accept any false and fabricated case, the BNP secretary general said.

No threat would be able to refrain them from performing their duties, Delwar said adding, "Now we are discussing about the programmes that would be announced soon."

"Everything is going on as part of a blueprint, even the January 11 event was totally pre-planned," he said, adding that the judges cannot discharge their duties properly at present as the laws created in a 'special factory' are being used at will.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, said that greater programmes would be announced soon as BNP will not accept any illegal activities.

"Go back to your own positions after handing over the power to the elected representatives without creating any complexities," he called upon the government, adding that the political leaders will ensure a peaceful law and order situation.

Among others, BNP joint secretaries general Selima Rahman and Goyeshwer Chandra Roy, acting office secretary Rizvi Ahmed, former lawmakers Syed Mehedi Ahmed Rumi, Nazimuddin Alam and Khairul Kabir Kokhon, Chhatra Dal General Secretary Shafiqul Bari Babu were present.

Rizvi Ahmed alleged that some unidentified persons are threatening the members of Delwar's family over phone.

Relief starts arriving

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devastation in Myanmar was equivalent to that suffered after the 2004 tsunami which devastated southeast Asia.

The US president's wife Laura Bush accused Myanmar's military rulers of failing to warn people about the cyclone that devastated the country as a massive international aid operation gathered pace yesterday.

"Although they were aware of the threat, Burma's state-run media failed to issue a timely warning to citizens in the storm's path," the US First Lady said at the White House.

The UN disaster reduction agency deplored the absence of an early warning system in Myanmar that it said could have drastically cut the death toll.

"Looking at the number of deaths, it leads us to think that an early warning system had not been put in place," Brigitte Leoni, spokeswoman for the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, told journalists in Geneva.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, state radio reported that the government was delaying a constitutional referendum in areas hit hardest.

Myanmar's Information Minister Maj Gen Kyaw Hsan confirmed at a news conference that some 4,000 people had died in Yangon and the low-lying Irrawaddy delta region. He added that another 10,000 people could be dead in the delta.

Kyaw said tidal waves killed most of the victims in that region.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Nyan Win was quoted by state-run television as saying that more than 10,000 people had perished in Irrawaddy while a smaller number died in and around Yangon, the country's largest city.

"News and data are still being collected, so there may be many more casualties," he said.

It was not known why the two ministers presented different death tolls.

The World Food Programme, which was preparing to fly in food, added its own grim assessment of the destruction: Up to 1 million people may be homeless, some villages have been almost totally eradicated and vast rice-growing areas are wiped out.

A state television report gave two different numbers 59 and 130 for the dead in what is known as Yangon division. It did not explain the differing tolls.

The country's ruling junta, which has spurned the international community for decades, urgently appealed for foreign aid at a meeting Nyan Win held with diplomats Monday in Yangon.

The UN's emergency relief coordinator said Tuesday the government had indicated it was ready to start accepting international aid. The UN, Red Cross and other aid organisations have been organising supplies in preparation for shipping them to the country.

Some aid agencies reported their assessment teams had reached some areas of the largely isolated region but said getting in supplies and large numbers of aid workers would be difficult.

A military transport plane flew from Bangkok to Yangon Tuesday with emergency aid from Thailand while a number of other countries and organisations said they were prepared to follow.

Richard Horsey, Bangkok-based spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid, said Yangon's airport is the closest to the region hardest hit.

"For those places accessible by land, there will be cars and trucks from those areas to meet at the halfway point with vehicles from Yangon," he said. "For remote areas, assessment teams and assistance teams will need to go by helicopters and boats."

The delta is riddled with waterways but Horsey said they are not easily accessible, even during normal times.

Based on a satellite map made available by the United Nations, the storm's damage was concentrated over about a 11,600-square-mile (30,000-square-kilometer) area along the Andaman Sea and Gulf of Martaban coastlines less than 5 percent of the country.

But the affected region is home to nearly a quarter of Myanmar's 57 million people.

Hasina blames govt's

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the case, yesterday began submissions on his discharge petition.

At one stage of his arguments, Hasina drew the court's attention and said she was not feeling well. In response, Judge Mohammad Firoz Alam ordered the adjournment.

"The present government lacks the experience and skills needed to control the prices of essentials," defence counsels quoted Hasina as saying.

"Let people survive the crises. Don't impose taxes on essentials in the next budget," she said, adding that those in power now cannot even prepare a national budget.

"The government had no preparations and even a clue about the recession looming over world economy," Hasina's special aide Dr Hasan Mahmud quoted her saying.

Those running a country must bear in mind that the world economy can suffer upheavals any moment and leave adverse effects on the national economy, she continued.

"However, it is still possible to cope with the adversities only if the country has enough precautions in place."

Hasina said as a result of the precautionary measures that her

Images from state television showed large trees and electricity poles sprawled across roads and roofless houses ringed by large sheets of water in the delta region, which is regarded as Myanmar's rice bowl.

"More or less all the landlines are down and it's extremely difficult to get information from cyclone-affected areas. But from the reports we are getting, entire villages have been flattened and the final death toll may be huge," said Mac Pieczowski, who heads the International Organization for Migration office in Yangon, in a statement.

State radio reported Saturday's vote on a draft constitution would be delayed until May 24 in 40 townships around Yangon and seven in the Irrawaddy delta, which bore the brunt of the killer storm.

It indicated that in other areas the balloting would proceed as scheduled.

The appeal for assistance was unusual for Myanmar's ruling generals, who have long been suspicious of the international organisations and have closely controlled their activities.

Foreign governments were poised Tuesday to rush aid to the devastated nation.

The United States, which has slapped economic sanctions on the country, said it likewise stood ready. The US Embassy is providing \$250,000 in immediate aid from existing emergency fund. But first lady Laura Bush said Monday the US would provide further aid only if one of its own disaster teams is allowed into the country.

The European Commission was providing \$3 million in humanitarian aid while the president of neighbouring China, Hu Jintao, promised \$1 million in cash and supplies.

The government had apparently taken few efforts to prepare for the storm, which came bearing down on the country from the Bay of Bengal late Friday. Weather warnings broadcast on television would have been largely useless for the worst-hit rural areas where electricity supply is spotty and television a rarity.

"The government misled people," said Thin Thin, a grocery store owner in Yangon. "They could have warned us about the severity of the coming cyclone so we could be better prepared."

Yangon was without electricity except where gas-fired generators were available and residents lined up to buy candles, which have doubled in price since the storm hit. Most homes were without water, forcing families to stand in long lines for drinking water and bathe in the city's lakes.

Most telephone landlines appeared to be restored by late Monday, but mobile phones and Internet connections were down.

Some in Yangon complained that the 400,000-strong military was only clearing streets where the ruling elite resided but leaving residents, including Buddhist monks, to cope on their own in most other areas.

Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962. Its government has been widely criticized for suppression of pro-democracy parties such as the one led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for almost 12 of the past 18 years.

At least 31 people were killed and thousands more were detained when the military cracked down on peaceful protests in September led by Buddhist monks and democracy advocates.

Wholesale price

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stopped purchasing new rice a couple of days ago due to low sales and falling prices. The agency will not procure more rice until the prices of the commodity stabilise, he added.

The Daily Star correspondent during a visit to different retail markets noticed many retailers were selling the low-priced new rice at higher prices to unsuspecting customers, telling them that the rice was from the old stock.

A few of the retailers were seen selling Miniket at Tk 44-45 per kg although its wholesale price is down to Tk 37-38 kg.

Revised budget

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agriculture ministry will be increased to Tk 3,900 crore from the initial allocation of Tk 2,250 crore mainly for subsidies in fertiliser.

Allocation for the food and disaster management ministry is going to be increased by Tk 837 crore in the current fiscal. The government is going to increase allocation for relief works to Tk 879 crore from Tk 466 crore. Besides, allocation for VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) is going to be increased to Tk 854 crore from Tk 807 crore.

The sources say allocation for food import in the current fiscal may be increased to Tk 2,913 crore from the initial estimate of Tk 1,576 crore.

But at the same time as the procurement target of food grains from local market failed, allocation in this sector was decreased to Tk 1,543 crore from Tk 2,264 crore.

Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) allocation under the women and children affairs ministry may be increased to Tk 736 crore from Tk 435 crore.

The sources say the net loss in petroleum products and fertiliser in the current fiscal may stand at Tk 14,000 crore and the government is considering providing Tk 9,500 crore from the current budget.

Allocation for payment interest against foreign and local loans may be increased to Tk 11,800 crore from the original allocation of Tk 10,790 crore, add the finance ministry sources.

Mockbul

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Fatema Tahera was fined Tk 5 lakh. She would have to serve six months more in jail if she fails to pay the amount.

Mockbul was handed down 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for illegally accumulating wealth worth Tk 5.33 crore and three years' simple jail for concealing information of wealth worth over Tk 2.84 crore in the wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

Mockbul will have to serve 13 years in jail as the court ordered that the convictions be carried out consecutively.

Both Mockbul and his wife are absconding and the verdict would take effect from the day they surrender to the court or were arrested.

The judgment was delivered after examining the investigation report and depositions of 36 witnesses.

ACC Deputy Director Akhter Hossain filed the case with Mohammadpur Police Station against Mockbul and his wife on August 16, 2007.

The property Mockbul amassed by illegal means include three houses in Mohammadpur in the capital and shares in different banks and institutions.

Export of rice

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According to data gathered from Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the country exported Tk 37.2 crore worth of rice till February -- up from Tk 28.2 crore during the same period of the last fiscal year.

The EPB sources said rice export hit the highest monthly figure of Tk 5.6 crore in February.

Besides aromatic rice, Bangladesh also exported non-aromatic varieties of rice such as Miniket, Pajiam and Nazirshali to the United States and a number of countries in the Middle East.

Bangladesh spent \$600 million in rice import in the first eight months till February of this fiscal to meet the country's demands after being hit by twin floods and a massive cyclone last year.

According to government data, this fiscal year's rice import is at least ten times higher than that of the same period in the last fiscal. This extensive import of rice has created huge pressure on the country's balance of payment, observed experts.

UNB adds: BDR sector commander, Dinajpur, yesterday ordered his troops to shoot anyone smuggling out food grains.

Exchanging views with UP chairmen and farmers of the border areas at Mohanpur BDR camp, Sector Commander Col Rezual Kabir said they were apprehending smuggling of Boro out of the country, as price across the border tends to be higher.

"We shall not hesitate to shoot if anyone is found smuggling out food grains," warned Col Kabir. Col Kabir urged the UP chairmen and farmers to cooperate with local BDR personnel to check smuggling.

UK wants

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meetings with BNP acting Secretary General Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and Jatiya Party Chairman HMErshad at their residences.

Choudhury said these were his farewell calls, as he was deeply engaged with the parties in his four years' stay in Bangladesh.

After the meeting with Hafiz, he said they discussed many issues including the future of Bangladesh and the elections.

Asked about the state of emergency, the envoy said it should be lifted to maximum possible extent ensuring the law and order and the safety of the voters.

Hafiz praised the high commissioner for his active role in promoting Dhaka-London relations. He deplored the heinous attacks on the high commissioner in Sylhet.

"People will remember him for long. He is a genuine friend of Bangladesh," Hafiz said.