

BNP bigwigs, Nizami

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were former CPA chairmen Commodore (ret'd) Zulfiqur Ali and AMM Shahadat Hossain, former CPA director (transport) AM Sanwar Hossain, former chief finance and accounts officer Ahmed Abul Qasem, former director Luthful Kabir, Ismail Hossain Simon—son of former shipping minister and BNP leader Col (ret'd) Akbar Hossain, Akbar's wife Jahanara Ansar, Gato directors Syed Galib Ahmed, Syed Tanveer Ahmed, AKM Musa Kajor and Ehsan Yusuf.

Dropped from the charge sheet are former cabinet secretary Saadat Hussain, former joint chief of shipping ministry Khandaker Khaliuzzaman, former deputy secretary Abdul Matin, former deputy chief Jayanto Kumar Nandi, former joint chief of planning ministry Abdul Matin, CPA Director Kazi Abdul Momen, and Gato Chief Accountant Mosharrar Hossain.

The accused are charged with causing a loss of Tk 14,56,37,616.92 to the state by striking the container-handling deal with Gato although it lacked experience and skills.

The charges also include violating tender conditions in appointing Gato for the job, misuse of power, and mutual understanding among the accused in violating the tender conditions.

This is the second charge sheet the ACC has approved against Khaleda since her arrest and the first against Koko. The ACC approved the first charge sheet against Khaleda on April 30 in a graft case involving Canadian gas exploration and extraction company Niko Resources. The charge sheet was submitted on May 6.

Koko and Simon have been indicted as investigation found their involvement in taking Tk 2,19,99,736 from Gato in exchange for helping it win the job.

Mosharrar Hossain, Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Dr Khandaker Mosharrar, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, and Motiur Rahman Nizami were also accused earlier in the ACC case filed for graft in awarding Barapukuria coal mine operation contract to a Chinese company while AKM Mosharrar Hossain is an accused in the graft cases involving Niko and Barapukuria coal mine.

ACC Director General (Administration) Col Hanif Iqbal confirmed the press yesterday afternoon about the approval of the charge sheet.

Joint forces arrested Khaleda and Arafat at their Dhaka Cantonment residence a day after ACC Deputy Director Golam Shahriar Chowdhury filed the case with the Tejjagon Police Station.

Khaleda is now in a sub-jail set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

Different newspapers and news agencies on November 5 carried news items that investigating officer ACC Deputy Director Johirul Huda in his report proposed inclusion of the names of 18 more people in the charge sheet.

CID sues Babar

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The other accused are Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam, Director of East West Property Development Pvt Ltd Abu Sufian, and a Director of Prime Bank and former BNP lawmaker Qazi Saleemul Huq Kamal.

CID Assistant Superintendent Arman Ali filed the case with Ramna Police Station.

Earlier on May 6, the Anti-Corruption Commission pressed charges against former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, Babar, Saleemul Huq, Shah Alam and his two sons Shafiat Sobhan Sanvir and Sadaat Sobhan, Abu Sufian and Tarique's personal secretary Mia Nur Uddin Apu.

The anti-graft body said the eight were involved with the bribery to save Sanvir from the charges of killing Sabir, whose body was found outside a building in Bashundhara residential area on July 5, 2006.

Dhaka's fight

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The disruption and dismantling of the JMB has shown that the Bangladesh government is serious about terrorism. This place does not harbour nor allow terrorist transit..."

Asked about forming a joint working group with Bangladesh, Dailey said, "We've numerous joint working groups right now to counter terrorism. Our relationship with Bangladesh across the border -- economically, militarily -- covers all of the needs to counter terrorism."

Briefing reporters over the meeting, Home Secretary Abdul Karim said Dailey assured of providing assistance in training the country's law enforcers including police and the Rapid Action Battalion.

"He also said the US will consider assistance in training members of community police," Karim added.

Dailey also paid a visit to Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif at his office to assess the legal infrastructure of the country for combating terrorism effectively.

Law Adviser Arif following the meeting told reporters "We [Dailey] came to discuss our legal infrastruc-

BNP reformists

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before it. If they show up there is every chance they would be sent to jail since the charge against them is non-bailable, and if they don't, arrest warrants would be issued against them, according to legal experts.

When the Gato case was filed on September 2 last year, none of Saifur and Bhuiyan was among the accused. But later their names were included in the charge sheet after the anti-graft body probe found their 'involvement in the offence'.

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who has been detained since September 3 last year, was arrested in hours after the case was filed.

The ACC is conducting investigation also in the Boropukuria coal mine case that was filed on February 16 under emergency power rules against Khaleda, Saifur and Bhuiyan, among others.

Meanwhile, Saifur's statement has upset the leaders with the background of left politics. They plan to raise the issue after Major (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, acting secretary general appointed by the standing committee, returns to the capital.

Saifur on Wednesday night said the pro-reform leaders who were once involved with leftist parties can only split the party. He also alleged that Khaleda Zia's government could not implement many a good decision due to those leaders who were in the cabinet then.

Meanwhile, Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, yesterday welcomed Saifur's statement. He said he hopes that the other 'dissidents' would follow the senior most standing committee member's lead, and at the end return to where they belong.

He also observed that the reconciliation move would only get stronger after Saifur's remarks.

DELWAR SLATES GATCO CHARGE SHEET
BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday condemned the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) decision to approve the charge sheet in the Gato corruption case against Khaleda Zia.

He alleged that the charge sheet has been approved as part of the conspiracy to keep their party chairperson in jail.

"She [Khaleda] was not involved in any corruption. A file comes to the Prime Minister's Office for final approval after being approved by all government committees concerned," he told The Daily Star last night.

He also alleged that the government wants to hold a 'blueprint' election and prevent the party president from participating in the electoral process by filing cases against her.

On the other hand, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid told The Daily Star that the ACC approved the charge sheet to harass their party chief Monir Rahman Nizami.

Justice Fazlul

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97 lakh beyond his known source of income.

ACC sources said a team of investigators, including investigation officer Mohammad Ibrahim, questioned Justice Fazlul Haque, his wife Sultana Haque and brothers Aynul Haque and Ekramul Haque at the ACC headquarters.

Meanwhile, the ACC yesterday filed a case against Justice Fazlul Haque's son-in-law Tariqur Rahman Prince for failing to submit his wealth statement to the commission in due time.

Assistant Director Ibrahim filed the non-submission case with Cantonment Police Station under section 26(2) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004.

The ACC issued a notice on April 15, asking Prince to submit his wealth report to the commission within seven working days.

Pro-Khaleda BNP

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prayers across the country on May 16 (Friday), seeking release of the now detained former prime minister.

The other demands include release of all political leaders, withdrawal of emergency and checks on indoor politics, measures to contain price spiral of essentials, introduction of rationing system for those hard-pressed and cancellation of the Election Commission's (EC) delimitation of parliamentary constituencies.

Besides, the faction led by Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by chairperson, announced programmes to observe the death anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman on May 30.

Those include hoisting BNP flags at half-mast, laying wreaths at Zia's grave in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and holding discussions.

The party and its front organisations will distribute food among the destitute people throughout a week beginning from June 2.

Delwar came up with the raft of demands and programmes at a press briefing at his Nam flat yesterday afternoon.

Speaking on the occasion, he called for the government to scrap the draft gazette on the constituency demarcation.

Delwar demanded withdrawal of the cases against all political prisoners and an end to the state of emergency.

He also asked for withdrawal of the charge sheet against BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman in the bribery case concerning the murder of Basundhara Group director Sabir.

Among others, BNP Joint Secretary General Selima Rahman and acting office secretary Rizvi Ahmed were present at the briefing.

EC roadmap

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million voters of which major portion has been completed, and carrying out reform of electoral rules "so that money, muscle and misuse of authority do not influence the future elections".

The EC has already held a series of dialogues with different political parties on reform of electoral rules, which was also a public demand, he told the duo US emissaries.

"Soon the EC will come out with a set of recommendations on reform of electoral rules," he added.

Referring to various institutional reforms and pragmatic steps in line with public demand as well as for smooth transfer of power, the CA said, "We are fulfilling our commitment."

He said reform will continue in the future as it is a continuous process.

Boucher said he is glad, as the caretaker government has given a lot of emphasis on future elections. He said reform should go on a wide scale.

Appreciating Bangladesh's counterterrorism measures, particularly legal procedures, Boucher said his country would like to follow the model of action.

He also said the US wants to see democracy succeed in Bangladesh and definitely supports the country in its effort to strengthen the democracy.

Boucher said his country will be a partner of Bangladesh in the field of development, economy and counterterrorism.

Proposed dialogue between the government and the political parties was also came up in the meeting.

About reform in political parties, the CA said the political parties have to decide on their own.

The CA said Bangladesh values close and friendly relations with the United States and wants to carry it forward, particularly in the field of education, combat terrorism and trade and economy.

Boucher noted that Bangladesh has achieved considerable success in counterterrorism and they were looking forward to working professionally with those who are dealing with terrorism.

He appreciated various Acts formulated by the interim regime, like the Anti-Money Laundering Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act, to curb terrorism.

The CA said, "Bangladesh takes tough stand both domestically and internationally in dealing with terrorism."

CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim briefed newsmen about the outcome of the meeting.

US Ambassador James F. Moriarty and Secretary to CA's Office Kazi Aminul Islam were also present.

Our staff correspondent adds: After talks with Foreign Secretary Tuhid Hossain at the foreign ministry yesterday, Boucher said it is important for the US to see Bangladesh hold its elections by the end of the year.

"Domestically, you are on a path

to democracy. It is important for us to see the path completed by the end of the year," he said.

They discussed the caretaker government's plans to implement its electoral roadmap to ensure the elections by the end of the current year.

"We see a democratically elected government emerge, in Bangladesh from next year. But also see the guarantees for democracy that is put in place to continue on a stable basis for the long term," he added.

Boucher added that institutional reforms undertaken by the government, in bodies such as the Anti-Corruption Commission and the planned Human Rights Commission would guarantee the sustainability of democracy in the country.

"We are here with a broad agenda. The agenda, I think, speaks of the desires and needs of the people of Bangladesh," he said.

Boucher said the US is ready to assist Bangladesh restore its democracy and push forward economic development.

The US State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism Dell L. Dailey accompanied Boucher.

"In addition to democracy and development, one of the main issues for us is denial of space for terrorists," said Boucher.

Boucher also met Army Chief Gen. Moeen U Ahmed at the army headquarters yesterday.

He is scheduled to meet the Chief Election Commissioner today.

Boucher last came to Bangladesh in late 2006. This is the highest profile visit by a US official since the state of emergency was declared on January 11 of last year.

ACC team starts
Other members of the team are ACC Assistant Directors Mojahar Ali Sarder, Mahbul Alam and Toufikul Islam, and ACC Deputy Assistant Director Chowdhury MN Alam.

The investigation team will have the authority to visit any office or department under the DCC. If necessary, the ACC team will coordinate with the task force that is already conducting investigations at the DCC for the last few months.

The ACC earlier formed task force teams to investigate irregularities at Roads and Highways Department and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

CHARGE SHEETS
The charge sheet against Shahidul Islam will be submitted under sections 409 and 420 of penal code, section 5 (2) of corruption prevention act 1947, and 17 (ka) of ACC act 2004 for misappropriating Tk 84,599 worth of CI sheets meant for relief.

The charge sheet against Taimur, the former BRITC (Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation) chairman, will be submitted under section 409, 420 and 109 of penal code and section 5 (2) of corruption prevention act 1947 for selling 167 CNG auto rickshaws at double the price.

The charge sheet against Laskar will charge him for concealing information about Tk 2,12,24,665 worth of wealth from the ACC and amassing Tk 41,88,947 worth of wealth through means beyond his known sources of income. His wife Mahfuza Sulatana will also be charged for abetting her husband.

Meanwhile, five persons including former Rupali bank managing director Abdul Hamid Mian and general manager Mainul Haque submitted their wealth statement to the ACC during the last two days.

EU wants polls

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Ambassador Stefan Frowein in a statement at the Europe Day press conference at the Sheraton Hotel in the capital.

Replying to questions about implications of election boycott threats by political parties, German Ambassador Frank Meyke called upon political parties to carry out reforms and remain committed to elections.

"If they boycott, political parties would have to bear the responsibility of bringing back a situation similar to that before the state of emergency was declared (in January 11, 2007)," said Meyke.

Frowein said, "Boycott is not nice and not something we like. But it does not mean an election cannot be free, fair and credible -- not a sine qua non."

He also said the January 22 elections in 2007 were called off not because the Awami League threatened to boycott the polls, but because it was a "one-sided election."

French Ambassador Charley Causseret said he is frustrated by the reluctance of political parties to talk about their political and economic policies after the elections. He is also disappointed at the media's failure to raise these questions.

Frowein also said, "The EU supports the lifting of the state of emergency as soon as the situation allows and it is important that there is a level playing field in the run up to the elections."

"We call upon the political parties to live up to their national responsibility and constructively participate in dialogue with the government and the Election Commission," he added.

The EU will send a small exploratory election observer mission in June to assess the situation. A larger observer team, led by a European Parliamentary member, might arrive once the exploratory mission submits its report.

The EU and its member states disbursed \$580 million in aid to Bangladesh last year.

SC Bar plans

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Newly elected SCBA President Barrister Shafique Ahmed told the press about their decisions after yesterday's judgment given by the seven-member full bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin, against HC verdict that

quashed an extortion case against Sheikh Hasina and declared illegal bringing of the case under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

"The SCBA in its earlier general meeting had decided that it would not give farewell to the present chief justice when he retires," said Barrister Shafique.

"We will do this as a mark of silent protest against the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court," he told reporters after receiving SC judgment on Hasina's case.

He said the SCBA has taken up this programme to uphold the constitution.

Barrister Shafique, also the counsel for Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, strongly criticised yesterday's judgment of the Appellate Division. He also criticised the apex court's recent verdict, cancelling another HC judgment that declared its jurisdiction to consider bail petition in criminal cases under the EPR.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq, chief counsel for Hasina, explained that SCBA's programme is not against any person -- it's a silent protest against the Appellate Division.

It's illegal, unjust

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"There can be no election in the country without her, and no peace," Zillur told journalists at his Gulshan residence in the capital after exchanging views with leaders of Bangabandhu Krishibid Parishad.

Zillur said bringing past incidents under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) for justice could not be the rule of law. "It is illegal and unjust," he said.

He lamented that they had expected justice from the Supreme Court, but in vain.

The AL leaders said that the government does not enjoy the vast popularity at present that it had earlier. The government should realise that fact, they said, adding that only a free, fair and credible election could pull the nation out of the present situation.

However an election is not possible in the country with Hasina still in jail, as the people would not accept that, they pointed out.

AL leaders Abdul Razzak, Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Dr Abdul Razak, Prof Saidul Haque Chowdhury and Saidur Rahman Selim, among others, also spoke to the media at the time.

Abdur Razzak told reporters that the party would continue both the legal battle and agitation programmes for the release of the AL president.

Motia Chowdhury said although the talk is about a legal battle to free Hasina, the law is not being allowed to take its own course.

The Supreme Court (SC) verdict overturned the High Court (HC) judgement and validated the trial of Hasina under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) in an extortion case filed by businessman Azam J Chowdhury.

Bangabandhu Krishibid Parishad leaders handed over Tk 60,000 to Zillur Rahman towards the cost of the legal fight to free Hasina.

UN plane lands

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dead. People wailed as they described the horror of the torrent swept ashore by the cyclone. "I don't know what happened to my wife and young children," said Phan Maung, 55, who held onto a coconut tree until the water level dropped. By then his family was gone.

The World Health Organization has received reports of malaria outbreaks in the worst-affected area, and fears of waterborne illnesses surfacing due to dirty water and poor sanitation also remained a concern, said Poonam Khetrpal Singh, deputy director of WHO's Southeast Asia office in New Delhi.

"Safe water, sanitation, safe food. These are things that we feel are priorities at the moment," she said.

Myanmar's generals, traditionally paranoid about foreign influence, issued an appeal for international assistance after the storm struck Saturday. They have since dragged their feet on issuing visas to relief workers even as survivors faced hunger, disease and flooding.

Even near Yangon, the country's largest city, stricken villagers complained that they had received no government assistance and were relying on Buddhist monasteries, which have been helping the public cope with the disaster.

"The government is not helping us. No aid is coming. There is no money, no rice," said Mu Sanda, one of some 50 people huddled in a monastery dining room converted into an evacuation center in Kyauktan, 15 miles southeast of Yangon.

Even China, Myanmar's closest ally, urged the military junta to work with the international community. Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said China would give \$4.3 million in aid in addition to an initial pledge of \$1 million.

A UN spokesman in Bangkok, Richard Horsey, said between 30 and 40 visas requested by various UN agencies and private relief groups are pending with the Myanmar government.

"These are mostly people who have key experience in handling disasters of this scale, and so they can bring lessons from other similar disasters," he said. "The agencies are becoming frustrated."

The London-based human rights group Amnesty International said some donors were delaying aid for fear it would be siphoned off to the army.

WFP's regional director, Anthony Banbury, indicated the United Nations had similar concerns.

"We will not just bring our supplies to an airport, dump it and take off," he said. "This is one reason why there is a hold up now, because we are going to bring in not just supplies but a lot of capacity to go with them to make sure the supplies get to the people."

Myanmar's state television Thursday showed Prime Minister Lt. Gen. Thein Sein distributing food packages to the sick and injured in the delta and soldiers

Heavy fighting

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a test of confidence in the government, which seized the region from Tamil Tiger rebels last year.

Maj Gen Palitha Fernando said any foreigner not registered as an election observer cannot be in Eastern province during the polls.

An Associated Press reporter and a photographer were stopped at a checkpoint and were asked to go back.

Fernando said the barring of journalists and other foreigners during the elections was for their own protection.

"It could be dangerous. If something happens and a foreigner gets injured it will create problems," Fernando said.

Saturday's first-ever elections for the Eastern Provincial Council are seen as a referendum on the government's performance since it drove the rebels from their strongholds in the province last year.

Opposition parties accuse the government of forming an alliance with a group of former rebels accused of killings, abductions and recruiting child soldiers. They say the group has terrorised opposing candidates and voters.

The government says the group's members carry guns only to protect themselves from the Tamil Tigers, from which they broke away.

Tamil Tiger rebels have fought the government since 1983 to create an independent homeland for ethnic minority Tamils in the island's north and east. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

The government announced last July that it had cleared the east of rebels, although the guerrillas continue to operate in small cells and launch sporadic attacks on soldiers.

dropping food over villages. The date of the distribution was not given.

Navy vessels from India and planes from Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Laos and Bangladesh had arrived in recent days with medicine, candles, instant noodles, raincoats and other relief supplies, it said.

Although most Yangon residents were preoccupied with trying to restore their lives, activists using the cover of an almost-total power outage have written fresh graffiti on overpasses.

The graffiti include "X" marks a symbol for voting "no" in a referendum Saturday on a new military-backed constitution. Voting has been postponed until May 24 in Yangon, some outlying areas and parts of the delta heavily damaged by the storm.

Shari Villalosa, who heads the UN Embassy in Yangon, said the number of dead could eventually exceed 100,000 because safe food and water were scarce and unsanitary conditions widespread.

UN officials estimated as many as 1 million people were left homeless in Myanmar, which also is known as Burma.

Among them were the villagers in the Kyauktan monastery who said they had nowhere else to seek shelter and lacked food, water and money to rebuild their homes and rehabilitate their ruined rice fields.

Others in Kyauktan sought refuge in a primary school adjacent to the monastery where desks in classrooms were pushed together for makeshift beds.

Monks said they were receiving donations from the public and wealthier shop owners and then distributing them among the victims.

In Yangon, the roof of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was blown off and she was living in the dark after the electricity connection to her dilapidated lakeside bungalow was snapped in the cyclone, a neighbour said.

The detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate was using candles at night since she had no generator in her home, where she is being held under house arrest, said the neighbour, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

State radio said "unscrupulous elements" were spreading rumours of an impending earthquake, a second cyclone and looting in Yangon. Residents say some looting occurred at markets and stores in suburbs of Yangon earlier this week.

The warning about rumours appeared to be an attempt to calm the population as well as stop any gatherings that might turn into political agitation against widely detested military rule.

Rationing

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in the country.

Only an elected democratic government can control the skyrocketing price hike of essentials, the speakers said at the dialogue styled "Stop price hike, save people". They also called upon all political parties to incorporate the issue of food security into their election manifestos.

People's Forum on MDG and Campaign for Popular Education (Campe) jointly organised the dialogue at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Awami League Presidium member Suranjit Sengupta said rice production and people's purchasing capacity will have to be increased to control the prices of essentials.

"The country has to be self-sufficient in producing rice and other essentials. And for this, investment and subsidy in agriculture will have to be increased," Suranjit said, adding, "All of these can be possible when an elected democratic government comes to power after the next general election."

BNP leader and former state minister MA Mannan said the government should pay more attention to the agriculture sector, especially for increasing subsidy and investment.

Workers Party polit bureau member Hyder Akbar Khan Rono said rationing system should be immediately introduced for general people. "A long-term and effective planning is needed for increasing rice production and ensuring food security," he said.

Shishir Shil, executive director of People Empower Trust and member of the steering committee of People's Forum on MDG, said an inter-ministry task force for agriculture, food, fisheries, commerce, local government, land, law and science and technology will have to be formed to keep the price hike within people's buying capacity.

Ataur Rahman Mito of Hunger Free World, Shirin Akhter of Karmajibi Nari, political leaders Shahiduzzaman, Dr Abdul Razzaque, Abdu Shahid and SK Shahidul Islam, among others, addressed the dialogue presided over by Campe Director-in-charge Azizul Haq.