

Tofail, family sued

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case with Ramna Police Station, mentioned in the first information report (FIR).

The former minister deposited Tk 1.86 crore, earned by illegal means, to Standard Bank's Gulshan branch in different types of accounts -- savings, STD, Fixed Deposit Account (FDR) and Special Monthly Income Scheme (SMIS) -- in his own name and in the names of his wife and daughter at different times.

To escape punishment for illegal wealth, Tofail in connivance with his wife and daughter withdrew the amount and concealed it, a few months after the promulgation of Emergency Powers Act, 2007, the case statement said.

In the wealth statement to the ACC on December 5 last year, the AL presidium member mentioned that he, his wife and daughter own movable and immovable property worth Tk 1.27 crore.

According to the FIR, Tofail in his wealth statement showed a 2,800 square feet two-storey building owned by his daughter, which was constructed in 1989 at a cost of Tk 14.12 lakh. But the investigation found that Tofail's daughter had no income at that time.

The former minister's annual net income was about Tk 13.5 lakh during 1982-83 to 2002-03 tax year, but during the same period he accumulated wealth worth about Tk 41 lakh.

The case also said Tofail owns a piece of land worth Tk 37.13 lakh, which is inconsistent with his known sources of income.

Besides, Tofail's wife Anwara Ahmed owns Tk 21.20 lakh beyond their known sources of income as well.

TOFAIL'S REACTION

Tofail Ahmed yesterday vowed to deal with the graft case against him legally and said he is respectful to the law and the ACC.

"I'm not surprised with the filing

of the case, rather I am ready to go to jail. I'm neither afraid, nor am I hurt," Tofail said at a press briefing at his Banani residence.

"If somebody is 'liked,' he does not face any case, but if somebody is 'disliked,' he faces case. Such double application of law cannot go on in a country," the AL leader observed.

Tofail also expressed his unhappiness over his family members being charged in the case along with him.

The former minister asked the people not to mistrust him and urged the government to stop filing 'false charges' against political leaders and the process of humiliating the politicians.

AL PRESIDUM CONDEMNEDS CASE, DEMANDS WITHDRAWAL
Termining the case against its leader Tofail Ahmed "false and fabricated," the Awami League yesterday demanded that the government withdraw it immediately.

The demand came at an emergency meeting of the AL presidium, the highest policymaking body of the party, held at AL Acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence in the capital.

The meeting observed that the case has been filed against Tofail at a time when the AL has decided not to join the formal dialogue with government without AL chief Sheikh Hasina's release as per a decision by the party's central working committee.

Briefing the newsmen after the presidium meeting, AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said that the case against Tofail has been lodged in a bid to weaken Awami League.

Ashraf observed that "false" charges, which have no connection with corruption, are being brought against political leaders to destroy their careers.

He urged the government to refrain from the practice.

No dialogue

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He called on the government to ditch the idea of holding the upazila elections before the parliamentary polls.

Delwar was addressing a discussion meeting marking the 27th death anniversary of former president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman. Paltan Thana Jubo Kalyan Parishad organised the discussion at Photo Journalists Association Auditorium in the capital.

Asking the government to stop what he described as game playing in the name of holding the dialogue, the dehard BNP leader demanded the immediate release of detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina.

Termining the interim administration illegal, he said, "Why will we enter into talks with you? Who are you representing?"

The ongoing dialogue is doomed to failure amid so many restrictions, he said.

On upazila polls, he said, "The only job of the caretaker government is to assist the Election Commission in holding a free and fair parliamentary election and then transfer power to elected representatives."

"This is the reason why the constitution gives the caretaker government a 90-day timeframe for holding the polls", he said adding that there are no constitutional provisions for the caretaker government to rule the country for long.

He accused the government of secretly handpicking candidates from rural areas for the upazila elections, warning that individuals who are working as government agents prior to the upazila polls do not really know how people would punish them for their roles.

He questioned how the government could hold on to power when the three major political parties -- BNP, Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami -- do not want this government to be in power.

Hitting out at the government's human rights record, he criticised the ongoing anti-corruption campaign, saying the drive has been conducted in a bid to defame politicians.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and other four-party alliance leaders also spoke at the meeting.

TALKS WON'T SUCCEED WITHOUT HASINA, KHALEDA, NIZAMI, SAY JAMAAT
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh has said the political dialogue will not succeed and general elections will not be credible keeping the chiefs of three parties -- Motiur Rahman Nizami, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina -- in jail, reports UNB.

"During pre-dialogue interactions, we told the advisers that the release of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina is a must to have a productive dialogue," Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid told the news agency.

But, he said, the chief adviser in his address to the nation ignored the opinion. Rather, the government has created an odd situation for the dialogue by arresting the chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The Jamaat secretary general demanded release of the three leaders to make the dialogue successful.

He said the Jamaat central working committee will sit on June 2 to take stock of the overall situation and announce its official position on the dialogue.

Mojahid said Jamaat has already announced its programme until June 10 and is discussing with the allies of the four-party alliance to map out further programme to meet their demands.

Biman strikes

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aviation firm that won the bid for leasing the plane to Biman.

The Board of Directors of Biman on April 20 in a marathon meeting decided to lease an aircraft from Orient Thai.

On March 9, Biman leased a Boeing 747-200 from a Nigeria-based airline to minimise disruptions in flight schedules.

Biman has been facing serious troubles in maintaining flight schedules due to acute shortage of aircraft for quite some time.

Biman currently owns three types of aircraft -- four McDonnell Douglas DC10-30s, four Fokker F28s, and three Airbus A310-300s. Production of DC10-30s and F28s ended in the 80's due to their lack of viability in service.

Of the 11 planes of Biman fleet, only four or five are now operational while the rest are grounded.

Law ministry

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Logistic support would be provided by the public works ministry and manpower would be recruited by the establishment ministry in the formation process of the truth commission.

The decisions were made at a coordination meeting held at the office of the National Committee on Serious Crime and Corruption in the presence of law and home advisers." ACC Director General (admin) Col Hanif Iqbal told reporters at the commission's regular briefing in the afternoon.

He said the manpower for the truth commission would be derived from different ministries with their existing pays.

Hanif said the commission would have one chairman and two commissioners sponsored by the finance ministry.

About its operation, he said it would be confirmed after publication of the gazette notification. The gazette notification now awaits the president's signature.

"The commission will not perform under any institution like the court or ministry, but the law ministry will sponsor it," he said.

CA reiterates

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forces and police to enable them to accomplish their noble tasks more effectively," he said.

The CA was addressing a function marking the International Day of UN Peacekeepers at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre here. The Armed Forces Division (AFD) in association with the United Nations Resident Coordinator office in Bangladesh organised the programme.

Bangladesh is presently the second largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping operation. Some 9,199 Bangladeshi peacekeepers are now working in 14 missions.

Since its participation in the UN peacekeeping mission in 1988, 73,112 Bangladeshi peacekeepers have worked in 41 peacekeeping operations in 31 countries, the function was told.

Foreign Adviser Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Army Chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed and UN Resident Coordinator to Bangladesh Renata Dessallien also spoke at the function.

Navy Chief Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam, Air Chief Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman and Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury were on the dais.

Advisers, special assistants to the chief adviser, members of Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers and family members, members of the armed forces and distinguished personalities were also present at the function.

Brig Gen Monwar Hossain made a presentation on two decades of journey of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UN peace missions at the function.

Bangladesh Television broadcast the programme live.

The CA distributed crests among family members of some Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers while performing duties in UN peacekeeping missions. He also distributed crests among some injured Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers at the function.

A brief cultural show was staged to mark the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

In his speech, the CA said Bangladesh responds enthusiastically in sending its troops to its armed forces and police to far-flung conflict-ridden regions in different countries of the world under the UN Security Council mandate.

"Recently, our participation in the UN mission in Darfur has become another milestone in our unwavering commitment to global peace," he told the function.

Referring to respect and admiration earned by Bangladeshi troops and police from other countries and people they have served, the CA said the United Nations and members of the international community have time and again applauded the country's effective and courageous role in peace support missions.

Apart from their significant contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, the members of Bangladesh Armed Forces and police have also been playing an outstanding role in nation-building activities at home, the CA said.

He said Bangladesh's participation in peace support operations and other categories of multinational forces has increased its name and fame in the global arena which has substantiated the country's stand for the cause of world peace, enhanced diplomatic ties with its allies and brought Bangladesh closer to both developed and developing nations.

Business leaders

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by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

FBCCI leaders met Zillur Wednesday when the apex body of business leaders expressed doubt over the dialogue and the chances of political stability in the near future.

He said at least 300 representatives from different sectors in each district will attend the meeting to be held at the International Conference Centre (ICC) at the Chief Adviser's Office.

Zillur also said the government advisers will travel to six or seven destinations around the world to meet Bangladeshi expatriate community leaders to discuss ways of making the electoral roadmap a success and establishing political stability.

He added that the government will also meet workers' representatives.

ICM DIALOGUE
The ICM asked the government to formulate a new law to punish blasphemy as the dialogue limped to its fourth day yesterday.

"We have asked the government to create specific punishment for any offence related to blasphemy," ICM Joint Secretary General ATM Hemayet Uddin told the post-dialogue joint press briefing at the Chief Adviser's Office.

The ICM is the sixth party to sit with the chief adviser and five other advisers in the dialogue, which has

"Our troops in the field along with diplomatic initiatives at UN headquarters have always reflected our commitment to lasting peace in the world," he said.

The CA paid glowing tributes to the peacekeepers who have made supreme sacrifice during the UN missions for the cause of bringing peace to strife-torn corners of the world.

He also appreciated all the Bangladeshi men and women who have served and will continue to serve in UN peace support operations.

Foreign Adviser Iftakhar said Bangladesh is ready to participate in peacekeeping missions responding to the need of the world.

Army Chief Gen Moeen said the wider participation Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping operations have made them confident to face any daunting task both at home and abroad.

He thanked and appreciated Bangladeshi peacekeepers for maintaining high degree of professionalism and skill in the peacekeeping missions.

Appreciating the outstanding performance of Bangladeshi peacekeepers, UN Resident Coordinator Renata said Bangladesh's outstanding contribution does not happen accidentally but it is the reflection of peace-loving people of the country.

Mojahid quizzed

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During the questioning, the source said, the former social welfare minister denied any wrongdoing on his part, saying that he acted "in good faith for the necessity of the state".

On Tuesday, four other former ministers -- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain and Shamsul Islam were quizzed in connection with the case at Dhaka Central Jail.

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia, the prime accused in the case, was questioned at the makeshift jail on Saturday last.

On February 26, ACC Assistant Director Shamsul Islam filed the case against Khaleda, 10 former ministers of her cabinet and five others for causing a loss of about Tk 159 crore from the exchequer through awarding the Barapukuria Coalmine deal to the highest bidder instead of the lowest.

Former finance minister M Saifur Rahman, ex-BNP secretary general and LGRD minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Jamaat chief and ex-industries minister Motiur Rahman Nizami and its secretary general and ex-social welfare minister Ali Ahsan M Mojahid are accused in the case.

The other former ministers accused in the case are health minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, agriculture minister MK Anwar, information minister Shamsul Islam, commerce minister Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, telecommunications minister Aminul Haque and state minister for energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain.

The remaining accused are former energy secretary Nazrul Islam, former Petrobangla chairman SR Osman, former Petrobangla director Moinal Ahsan, former managing director of Barapukuria Coalmining Company Sirajul Islam and Hossain Group Chairman Moazzem Hossain.

The case has been filed under sections 409/406/109/149/20 of the Penal Code and section 5(2) of the Corruption Prevention Act 1947.

Manpower export

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Bahrain urging them to lift the ban.

The adviser, it said, also made a telephone call to Bahrain State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Nizar Sadeq Al Babarna, seeking his assistance in lifting the ban.

Manama last week suspended issuance of work permits for new Bangladeshi workers in view of a strong anti-Bangladesh attitude developed among the people of Bahrain following a recent murder of a national of that country by an expatriate Bangladeshi.

The foreign ministry statement said the adviser in his letters conveyed his regret at the incident and expressed the hope that "the entire Bangladeshi community should not suffer for the misdeed of one person".

In line with the foreign adviser's directives, it said, the charge de affaires of Bangladesh mission in Manama has been holding a series of meetings with the Bahrain ministers, politicians as well as the members of Bangladesh community in the Gulf state.

According to the statement, the foreign adviser is expected to raise the issue with his Bahraini counterpart during the scheduled meeting of Islamic foreign ministers in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, next month.

In another statement on Wednesday, the foreign office said Bahrain's State Minister for Foreign Affairs promised to put in his efforts to lift the ban on recruiting Bangladeshi workers during his talks with Foreign Adviser Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury.

Earlier reports from Manama said Bangladeshi worker Mohammad killed Bahrain national Mohammad Hassan Al Dossary following an argument last week.

Soon after the incident, Bangladesh embassy in Manama sent a condolence message to the family members of the slain Bahraini and later the foreign adviser sent another letter regretting the killing and expressing his sympathy to them.

Vital documents

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The defence yesterday cross-examined two prosecution witnesses -- Sub-Inspector and recording officer of the case AK Anwarul Islam and Additional Director of Power Development Board (PDB) Abdul Halim.

Following a time petition by the defence, Judge Firoz Alam adjourned the hearing on the deposition of prosecution witnesses until June 3.

Former prime minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina was brought to the court at 10:00am. Former energy secretary Tawfique-e-Elahi Chowdhury was also produced before the court.

The defence started cross-examining third prosecution witness Abdul Halim around 11:00am after he submitted his deposition to the court.

Defence lawyer Advocate Syed Rezaur Rahman asked Halim how many tender files he had in his custody. Rezaur said, "I do not know."

The defence asked him who was the PDB chairman when he confiscated the documents and Halim said it was Khizir Khan.

When the defence told Halim that Khizir Khan did not give permission for confiscating the documents, he said it is not true.

Lawyer Rezaur asked him if he could produce the letter of permission before the court. Halim said he cannot because it was at his office.

As the defence asked Halim if he knows how many of the files he had produced before the court were eaten up by termites, he said he cannot recall.

The defence asked him if he knew that a file of Wartsila was attacked by termites. Halim said again that he cannot recall.

Advocate Rezaur then showed Halim the file and later submitted it to the judge.

Taking a look at the damaged document, Judge Firoz asked Halim if he uses any medicine to preserve the documents but Halim did not say anything. The judge recorded the matter.

Public prosecutors argued that only a tiny part of the cover page of the tender file was destroyed by termites.

Rezaur told Halim that the file was destroyed in his custody, but Halim said, "It is not true."

Later, the defence lawyers told reporters that several pages of the 10-year-old document on the bidding by Wartsila were destroyed by termites which will affect the defence.

"Is the destruction of the documents deliberate or caused by negligence?" Rezaur said while talking to reporters.

The public prosecutors, however, said a document's being eaten up by termites is nothing unnatural and only a tiny part of the file's cover page was destroyed.

Death anniversary

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Zia, who founded Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1978, was assassinated on this day in 1981 by a group of disgruntled army officers at Chittagong Circuit House.

The party has taken up limited programmes to observe the day. Party flag will be hoisted at day-mast at the central party office at Naya Paltan and all party offices across the country. A black flag will also be hoisted at the central party office.

Leaders and workers of BNP and its front organisations will place wreaths at Zia's grave at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital early in the morning and offer Fateha.

A discussion will be organised at the Institution of Engineers at 3:00pm. BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain will preside over the function to be attended by senior party leaders.

However, the number of participants at any of the programmes will not exceed 200 because of the state of emergency. Also, there will be no procession and slogans.

In a statement on the eve of the day, Delwar vowed to foil what he

termed the "blueprint of the totalitarians" to destroy the nationalist force.

"We have to foil the blueprint together also to protect the sovereignty of the country and establish democracy," said Delwar.

He said Ziaur Rahman was brutally killed to vitiate the country's independence. "The repression and imprisonment of Zia's family and BNP leaders and workers is part of that conspiracy," he added.

Delwar said the BNP would form the government in future under the leadership of Khaleda and implement Zia's 19-point programme to turn the country into a developed and prosperous nation.

Meanwhile, President Iajuddin Ahmed paid tribute to Zia, describing him as one of the pioneers of Bangladesh's independence.

In a message, Iajuddin said with deep respect people of the country remember Ziaur Rahman's contribution to the Liberation War and his firm leadership in protecting democracy, independence and sovereignty.

Ousted Nepali king

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palace in the heart of Kathmandu, with the complex to be transformed into a national museum.

In a sign that the king is likely to respect the verdict of the assembly that ended his reign, the royal flag was lowered Thursday morning and replaced by Nepal's triangular national flag.

"The flag has been changed as part of the government decision to implement a republic," a palace official told AFP.

Although Gyanendra looks set to leave the palace, there is no sign of him going into exile abroad -- even though his arch-enemies, the Maoists, have emerged as Nepal's main political force.

Last month, after media reports suggested the king was considering moving to India, the palace issued a statement dismissing the suggestions as "malicious" and insisting he would stay put.

A 300,000-dollar annual allowance for the royal family was also stopped with Wednesday's abolition, but the king is unlikely to feel any significant financial pinch.

He has long-standing investments in several businesses -- including a five-star hotel, a cigarette and clothing company and a tea garden.

The shares he owns in these companies are worth around 15.7 million dollars, according to financial journalist Mukul Humagain.

Judging the king's immense wealth is a tricky task because he transferred his considerable business interests to his daughter when he came to the throne, Humagain, a business writer for Nepal magazine, said.

"15.7 million dollars is what we know from formal evaluation. We have no idea how much more he has in foreign banks or other Nepali businesses," said the journalist.

"People say he has large amounts of cash in banks in Singapore and London, but it's impossible to know how much he is worth."

It remains to be seen whether the king will be allowed to continue presiding over the many Hindu festivals he usually attends annually, but his interest in tantric practices remains strong.

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enough to prevent the end of his line.

Gyanendra, who is 61, also lives under the shadow of congenital illness, with many in his bloodline dying at around the age of 60 from chronic heart disease.

His hard-living and reviled son Paras suffered a heart attack last year at the age of 36, but the king has slimmed down in the last two years and is reportedly following a vegetarian diet as well as strolling the palace grounds daily.

Gyanendra, the final monarch in a dynasty that began with the founder of modern Nepal Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th century, came to the throne after a bizarre and bloody palace massacre in 2001.

His nephew, Dipendra gunned down most of the royal family, including the king and queen, after he had been prevented from marrying the woman he loved.

Gyanendra, never particularly popular, was further reviled in 2005 after he sacked the government and took direct control of the nation, pushing the mainstream parties and Maoists into an alliance that led to a 2006 peace pact and Wednesday's declaration of a republic.

Suicide bombers

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al-Qaeda in the country and Iraqi and US forces have been conducting a major crackdown against jihadists in the area since May 14.

The latest violence came as the US military announced plans to withdraw next month another 4,000 "surge" troops from Iraq after reporting that violence across the country had hit a four-year low.

That will be the fourth brigade to withdraw from Iraq out of five that deployed under the controversial surge in February 2007, which saw an extra 30,000 soldiers poured in to curb sectarian violence.

"The brigade played an integral role in establishing the conditions for long-term security in Iraq by reducing violence in Diyala province by 70 percent," a military statement said.

On Sunday, US officials said Iraq was seeing the lowest level of violence in four years, but they gave no casualty figures.

Figures maintained by the independent website www.casualties.org show that the US death toll so far this month was 19, the lowest average since the invasion.