

Khoka gets bail in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to former Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and three others in a corruption case.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case on February 15 against the four, accusing them of misappropriating Tk 26 lakh from the public fund and adding a loss of another Tk 11 lakh to it.

The other accused are Abdul Baten, president of DCC Supermarket in Banani, Mahmudul Hassan Azad, its general secretary and AHM Tareque, manager of the market's parking lot.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shamsul Islam yesterday passed the order after the four accused appeared before the court and sought bail in the case.

During the hearing, the defendants' counsels told the court that Khoka and the three other accused surrendered to the High Court on February 16.

After the hearing, the HC granted them anticipatory bail for a period of two months which expired yesterday, the counsels said.

However, Special Public Prosecutor Kabir Hossain told the court that the bail petitions should be rejected as the HC granted them bail only for two months.

Savar mayor fined for pollution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Environment (DoE) yesterday fined the mayor of Savar municipality Tk 50 lakh for dumping solid wastes into Karnapara canal in Savar.

A dyeing factory in Gazipur was also fined Tk 15 lakh for discharging untreated chemical waste into the river Turag, said a press release.

Mayor Mohammad Refayet Ullah appeared at the DoE's office after being summoned and admitted to have dumped waste into the canal; following a recent decision made by the municipality councillors, as there was nowhere else to dump the waste.

Mujibnagar

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tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had been declared the president of the government-in-exile. Syed Nazrul Islam was appointed as acting president in the absence of Bangabandhu.

Tajuddin Ahmad was appointed as the first prime minister while Khandaker Moshtaq Ahmed, Capt M Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman were made cabinet members.

The Liberation War under successful leadership of the provisional government brought to Bangladesh of the then East Pakistan victory on December 16, 1971.

Bangladesh Muktijoddha Janata League yesterday held a discussion marking this day.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday greeted people on the eve of historic Mujibnagar Day.

In separate messages, they paid rich tributes to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four national leaders Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Capt M Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman.

They also recalled the contribution and sacrifices of freedom fighters, their supporters and pro-independence forces.

The ruling Awami League and different socio-cultural organisations will observe the historic day today through large scale programmes.

The national and party flags will be hoisted atop at Bangabandhu Bhaban and the ruling party's central and district offices. Awami League will place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu and on the graves of the four national leaders. The party will also lay wreaths at the monument in Mujibnagar and arrange discussions.

ICT orders

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to bring some changes to his indictment order.

At the tribunal, the BNP lawmaker is facing 23 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

Fakhrul Islam, a defence counsel of the BNP leader, told the tribunal yesterday that the indictment order against Salauddin was passed on April 4 without paying any heed to some pending defence applications.

Referring to newspaper articles, Fakhrul said the order notes that Salauddin pleaded not guilty even though the BNP leader had said that he did not understand the charges read out to him. He also argued for discharging Salauddin from all charges.

Passing the order on April 4, tribunal chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq had asked Salauddin whether he understood the charges read out to him and whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty.

Salauddin had answered that he did not hear or understand the charges, and had asked the tribunal what he was guilty of.

"Of the charges," was the reply from the tribunal chairman, to which Salauddin had said: "What charges?"

Justice Nizamul Huq then said it was presumed that the accused had pleaded not guilty. Salauddin had replied, "Your presumption is completely wrong."

Fakhrul yesterday argued that Salauddin had pleaded neither guilty nor not guilty, and yet the tribunal presumed that he pleaded not guilty.

"You tell me. He was asked whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty, and what answer did he give?" said the tribunal chairman. "Is he allowed to answer like that? Move forward now."

The tribunal then said the law allows the court to either record the plea of guilty or not guilty, and nothing in-between. "Are you feeling prejudiced that we recorded that he is pleading not guilty?" the chairman asked.

The tribunal then told the defence counsel that if Salauddin did not plead innocent, he must have pleaded guilty.

"How are we supposed to edit and overwrite I'm not guilty?" the tribunal chairman asked Fakhrul. "The only two options we have are guilty or not guilty."

Fakhrul then insisted that the tribunal should have explained the charges to his

client, who had said that he did not hear or understand the charges.

"Salauddin Quader saheb is such a meritorious person... He has been a parliamentarian six times," said AKM Zaheer Ahmed, a judge of the three-member tribunal. "To believe that he did not understand the charges would be looking down upon him."

Upon hearing this, Salauddin was up on his feet in the dock. "Thank you! Thank you my lord!" he told judge Zaheer.

The BNP leader told the tribunal that when the tribunal chairman was reading out the charges brought against him, Justice Nizamul Huq had mentioned him as a member of the Muslim League.

"It was written in the order," he said. "I was really hurt after hearing this. I lost all interest and trust, and stopped listening."

Justice Nizamul Huq then assured Salauddin that if there was a mistake it could be corrected later on.

Prosecutor Zead Al Malum later went to the podium and protested Fakhrul's attempt to prove the BNP leader as "immature". He said there had been so many applications from the defence that it has become "annoying".

"The fact that you are hearing this annoying application is adding to the acceptability of this court," Salauddin Quader Chowdhury objected.

Meanwhile, the tribunal yesterday heard the defence arguments on the charges brought against Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami and secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

Abdur Razzaq, the chief defence counsel of the Jamaat leaders, argued that charges brought against the two Jamaat leaders do not correctly correspond to the incidents mentioned in the formal charges.

He said the charges say that the two leaders gave several statements during the war that inspired and instigated many atrocities committed during the 1971 Liberation War.

Razzaq said the statements could not be considered as crimes against humanity as the prosecution did not substantiate their links to any specific atrocities.

The defence would resume giving its arguments on April 24.

2 killed in road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A garment worker and his relative were killed in a road accident in front of BAF Shaheen College on Airport Road in the capital Sunday night.

The victims were identified as Mohammad Bahadur, 30, and his aunt Jahanara Begum, 50, of Sariakandi upazila in Bogra.

Bahadur worked at a garment factory in Gazipur and lived nearby while his aunt's residence was in Shaheenbagh of Tejgaon.

"We received a call from locals that there was an injured man and a woman in the middle of the road," said Abdul Rauf, sub-inspector of Kafilur Police Station.

A police team rushed to the scene and found them in a critical state, said Rauf adding that Bahadur had severe head injuries while Jahanara had a broken leg.

Bahadur was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead on arrival while Jahanara was taken to National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedic Rehabilitation (Nitor). She succumbed to her injuries early yesterday.

However, police could not confirm what vehicle hit the duo.

"Bahadur and his aunt were on their way to Gazipur. They were crossing the road to catch a bus," said the SI quoting family members.

Bangladeshi

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Motiar Rahman, son of Kami Uddin of Bhaighar village of the upazila, is now undergoing treatment at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

A local elected representative said the incident took place when Motiar went to the zero line to bring his cattle home around 11:30pm. A cocktail was hurled at him from inside Indian territory by BSF personnel from Bhimpur camp, opposite Daudpur border outpost.

Motiar was rushed to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital with severe injuries in his back and then shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital the next morning when his condition deteriorated.

Sources in Border Guard Bangladesh said no protest had been lodged until yesterday evening in this regard.

Earlier, on April 5 some BSF personnel crossed the border at night and stormed into Kher Mahmudpur village in the same upazila, where they proceeded to beat up the locals, firing two gunshots in the process.

The locals eventually fought off their attackers, foiling the BSF men's attempts to abduct two Bangladeshi nationals. Six villagers were injured in the attack.

ACC to probe

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yesterday at a meeting at its office in the capital took the decision to probe Soumen's properties.

Soumen has recently obtained an interconnection exchange licence from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission at Tk 5 crore, according to ACC sources.

Besides his other wealth, the ACC will specifically probe sources of this money, the ACC chairman said.

The ACC is also investigating properties of Suranjit, his recently sacked assistant personal secretary Omar Faruq Talukder, suspended railway general manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha and suspended Dhaka division security commandant Enamul Huq, he said. The four had been served notices asking them to submit details of their properties.

They came in the spotlight after Border Guard Bangladesh on April 9 seized Tk 70 lakh from Faruq's private microbus and detained Faruq, his driver Ali Azam, Mridha and Enamul at the BGB Pilkhana headquarters when they were reportedly going to Suranjit's Jigatola residence.

ACC's Deputy Director Akhter Hamid Bhuiyan has been assigned to investigate the properties of Soumen, Ghulam said.

"Investigation into Soumen's properties is part of our regular process," the ACC chief said, adding that the commission had made the move following media reports on his properties.

Around fifteen hours later



Nazmul Huda AKM Mosharraf Syed Abul Hossain Zahiruddin Khan Afsaruddin Ahmad Amir Khasru Iqbal H Mahmood

None resigned voluntarily

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tenure in 1991-1996, two ministers -- industries minister Zahiruddin Khan and information minister Nazmul Huda -- were asked to resign.

Khan tendered his resignation after several farmers were killed during a movement in protest of fertiliser crisis. Huda was forced to resign after he commented in favour of introduction of caretaker government system, which at that time was against the policy decision

of BNP. Three ministers -- Maj (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam, Afsaruddin Ahmad and Syed Abul Hossain -- resigned during the Awami League tenure in 1996-2001.

Maj Rafiq was removed from home ministry apparently for his statement on the 1999 bomb blast at an Udichi programme in Jessore. He said the grenade used in the attack could not be in the hands of civilians as those were only used by the military.

Afsaruddin was asked to resign following a slum eviction in the capital while Abul Hossain for possessing two passports and travelling with the green passport instead of the red one.

During BNP's last tenure in 2001-2006, then commerce minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain and state minister for power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood were asked to step down. Amir Khasru resigned

allegedly for allowing a syndicate to abnormally hike the prices of essentials and due to a conflict with then finance minister Saifu Rahman.

Mosharraf Hossain was forced to resign for receiving an expensive vehicle as bribe from a Canadian exploration company NIKO and conflict with Hawa Bhaban while Iqbal Hassan resigned reportedly for his failure to manage electricity crisis and conflict with Hawa Bhaban.

Suranjit shown the door

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from his assistant personal secretary's (APS) microbus on the night of April 9, he strongly defended his aide by saying he would not take action against the APS until the latter had been found guilty.

He also said the vehicle with the money was not heading for his Jigatola residence in the capital, contrary to the claims of the APS and two other railway officials travelling in the microbus.

But then, the Sunday night meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led to a change of mind in him. Sources at the Prime Minister's Office told The Daily Star that Suranjit got a "clear signal" from the one-to-one meeting with the PM that he was no more expected to head the ministry.

Suranjit, who has a long 55-year political career, told the press that he would also stay away from politics until he came "clear" through investigation, terming it a "break" in his political career.

"I made the decision for the sake of a fair investigation and to set an example, acting beyond the existing practice, and to uphold democracy," an embattled Suranjit told a large crowd of journalists who gathered at the Rail Bhaban following hints that he might step down.

The seven-time parliamentarian from Sunamganj in the northeast region also hoped that the "truth" would emerge through the inquiry.

Earlier in the morning, Suranjit skipped the regular cabinet meeting. He went to his Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office and prepared a draft which he read out at the briefing.

He went to the railway

ministry around 12:45pm on a vehicle flying the national flag. But after the announcement of his resignation, he left the ministry in the same car without the national flag at 3:15pm.

Before leaving, he had a farewell meeting with the officials and employees of the ministry and exchanged greetings with them.

Suranjit, who had originally been left out of the cabinet after the general elections of December 2008 apparently because of his "compromising" role during the 2007-08 military-backed caretaker government, finally got a berth in the newly-formed rail ministry in December last year, about three years into the government's tenure.

After taking office, he appeared to be a crusader against corruption in the railway and his vow to "catch the black cat from the bag" made such a bang that his downfall came almost like a whimper, an absolute anticlimax.

And the beginning of the end of his short ministerial career was signalled when the driver of his APS swerved the vehicle into the BGB headquarters in Pilkhana on the night of April 9 and raised an alarm about the APS and two other railway officials -- the now-suspended general manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mirdha, and Dhaka Division security chief Enamul Huq -- carrying Tk 70 lakh in bribe money.

The money is said to be part of the bribe taken recently from job seekers for about 7,000 posts in the railway.

In a belated reaction, Suranjit on Sunday sacked the

APS and suspended the GM and the security chief.

He also formed two committees to probe the scandal. But both the committees came under question as they were staffed by his personal secretary, a railway ministry joint secretary and the director general of railway, which is also under the ministry.

THE BRIEFING
The press briefing was scheduled to begin at 12:00noon but it began around 1:30pm.

At the briefing, Suranjit said he did not want to be a liability to his party, the government or the prime minister.

"Many cling on to power despite criticism. But I've made my decision going above the country's traditional politics. It'll brighten the image of the prime minister, my party and the government," he said.

He said a serious debate had surfaced centring on the April 9 incident. "Since my APS and an important official were involved in the incident, the ministry must take responsibility for it."

"I want to relieve myself from the ministry by taking responsibility for my failure as a minister, which has not been the culture in the 40-year history of Bangladesh," Suranjit said, adding he had been facing challenges since his childhood.

"I created history during my long political career. But today I am facing a conflict. I have a tough time ahead."

He went on, "I want to say with regret that in the last 40 years of democracy, we've only enjoyed the advantages of democracy, but nobody came forward to offer sacrifices when democracy was in

crisis. Today, I'm facing a challenge like that."

He added that he wanted to set a "rare example" in the political arena of Bangladesh by making such a decision.

Explaining his position since the cash haul, Suranjit said he had first formed two committees to investigate the matter, sacked his APS and suspended two railway officials.

"I also sent all documents of my APS to the ACC. But questions were raised by the media, civil society and leaders of my party that the probe would not be free of influence if I remained minister," he said.

"I'll prove my innocence and return to politics. I'm giving a pause in politics."

Suranjit said democracy in the country had time and again been disrupted. "The enemies of democracy are conspiring through taking advantage of the present situation. They are not plotting against an individual, but against the democratic system."

In the same way, a political party is trying to thwart the country's hard-earned parliamentary democracy, he said.

On his performance, Suranjit said he had tried his best to pull up the dying railway sector after the prime minister had split the communications ministry to create the railway ministry and given him charge of the new ministry.

"The present government undertook projects worth thousands of crores of taka to give new life to the ministry through expansion," he added.

Ministers go on

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politician apparently conveyed the PM's warning that none would be spared if found involved in graft.

According to sources, Hasina upon her arrival from Turkey on Saturday inquired from different sources about the Tk 70 lakh scandal.

In the afternoon, she exchanged views with party leaders, marking the first day of Bangla New Year. She compared the versions of her colleagues with that of other sources and found similarities in them.

On Saturday around 8:00pm, the prime minister in principle decided that Suranjit had to go.

As a senior minister that night wanted to know whether Suranjit would continue or not, the premier answered in the negative, sources in the government and party said.

On Sunday, the prime minister did not discuss the matter with anybody. Rather, she called on President Zillur Rahman at Bangabhaban in the evening, quite earlier than scheduled. All the ministers were invited there to snacks later at night.

The prime minister talked to the president about the issue and reached the conclusion that she would ask Suranjit to step down.

Sharing this view with only a few close aides at Bangabhaban, Hasina rushed to her official residence Gono Bhaban, informing the cabinet members that she had asked Suranjit to come there.

On Sunday around 10:00pm, Hasina talked to Suranjit and asked for his explanation of the affair. Not satisfied, she directed him to resign through a press conference.

at the Rail Bhaban, Suranjit announced before the media that he was quitting as railway helmsman.

Earlier in the morning, he informed the cabinet division that he would not attend the weekly meeting. The division rearranged the seating order of the meeting accordingly.

"With the prime minister's action, it has been proved that the party is above an individual and the country is above a party," Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star at her secretariat office yesterday.

"It has become clear that our position is strong against corruption and it will be so in the future."

About Suranjit's resignation, she said, "It's unpleasant for all of us and not expected in anybody's political life."

The minister said the image of the government had been created through its overall activities. But definitely this particular event would cause a little damage.

She said the last BNP-Jamaat government took no action on any corruption allegation and Sheikh Hasina had made a difference. "If the BNP looks at its own face, it will be well understood," said Matia, also a presidium member of the ruling Awami League and regarded as being close to Hasina.

Asked whether the prime minister had taken action against Suranjit as he had placed reform proposals during the last caretaker government's term, Matia said it would be wrong to think along such lines. "No such non-cooperation on his side has been noticed since he took over as minister."

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader, who took charge of his ministry the

same day that Suranjit became a minister, told The Daily Star "He [Suranjit] has stepped down on moral and ethical grounds. By doing so, he saved his dignity and that of other politicians and the government."

Terming the whole incident sad, he said an investigation into the alleged corruption was going on. "If he comes clean, it will be more dignifying," Quader, also an AL presidium member, said.

"By stepping down, he has honoured politics," State Minister for Land Mustafizur Rahman Fizar said.

He wondered what might have happened if the minister had adopted a rigid stance.

"What has happened from the beginning to end is painful and pathetic. From now on, his voice will be weakened as he won't be able to speak as he did in the past and it's damaging for democracy."

Capt (ret'd) AB Tajul Islam, state minister for liberation war affairs, said, "It's a rare example and at the same time it is very usual that a minister will resign following such a scandal."

Asked how the government could repair the damage caused by the incident, he said the people at the end would judge the government by all its activities. He did not think the image of the government had been harmed.

Suranjit has stepped down for the sake of free, fair and neutral investigation into the scandal. This is a positive step and it is also a milestone for democracy, said AL Joint General Secretary Mahubul Alam Hanif.

"We don't believe Suranjit is involved in corruption," he said, when asked for his party's reaction. "It doesn't match his long political career."

Jim Yong Kim

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over Nigerian Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who had argued that the huge development lender needs reorientation under someone from the developing world.

Kim, currently president of the Ivy League university Dartmouth College, will succeed outgoing president Robert Zoellick, a former US diplomat who is departing in June at the end of his five-year term.

The Bank's directors expressed "deep appreciation" to Kim, Okonjo-Iweala and a third candidate, Colombian economist Jose Antonio Ocampo, who pulled out of the race Friday.

The US nomination of Kim, breaking the pattern of the 11 American bankers and diplomats who have come before him, had surprised many, as he was little known outside global health circles and has no background in development economics.

But the South Korean-born, US-raised physician and anthropologist, with degrees from Harvard University, has a strong record in developing programs to fight diseases like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis in poor countries.

He said after being nominated that he had the ability to work with economists and other specialists in running the bank, which has 9,000 staff and a loan portfolio that hit \$258 billion in 2011, including \$43 billion in new loans and grants.

"I will come with an open mind and apply my medical and social-science training to take an evidence-based approach," he said, before embarking on a globe-spanning trip to convince other countries to back him.