

EMBEZZLEMENT

Lawmaker
Rony suedOUR CORRESPONDENT,
Patuakhali

A case was filed against Awami League lawmaker Golam Maula Rony and 14 others with a Patuakhali court yesterday in connection with their alleged involvement in embezzling Tk 79 crore from development projects.

Jamal Hossain of Dashmina upazila in the district filed the case with the District and Sessions Judge's Court.

The court fixed August 20 to start hearing on the case, said Abdul Khaleque, plaintiff of the case.

According to the case statement, Rony, his close associate Iqbal Mahmud Liton and 13 of his party men misappropriated at least Tk 79 crore of different government projects in the upazila.

In the last four and a half years, Rony and his associates had drawn money without doing any work in the projects, it said.

The accused misappropriated Tk 6 crore from test relief project, Tk 10 crore from food for work project, Tk 12 crore from 120-day project, Tk 20 crore from 20-day project, Tk 5 crore from programmes for ultra poor, Tk 3 crore from fishermen project, Tk 10 crore from road construction and repair projects, Tk 3 crore by selling trees on government land and Tk 10 crore from education fund.

Earlier, nobody dared to file any case against them in connection with their alleged involvement in the embezzlement as they were influential ruling party men, the statement read.

The plaintiff alleged that he went to Dashmina Police Station on August 4 and Anti-Corruption Commission's office in Patuakhali on August 8 to lodge formal complaints against the accused.

But they did not record his complaints, he added.

Export

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"Still, Bangladesh is a lucrative destination for many retailers and brands due to its price competitiveness," Shubhashish said.

In July, knitwear export was up 25.24 percent to \$1.25 billion on the same month of the last fiscal year. Similarly, woven garment export grew by 27.02 percent to \$1.27 billion.

"We need not to be worried because we are still a strong player in garment business globally," said Shahidullah Azim, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, a platform of garment makers.



A team of Detective Branch of police conducts a raid at Odhikar's head office at Gulshan in the capital yesterday evening.

PHOTO:
COURTESY

Odhikar secy remanded

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that tarnished the image of the state, the government and law enforcement agencies.

On June 10, Odhikar published online a report titled, "Assembly of Hefazat Islam Bangladesh and Human Rights Violation".

The rights body claimed that 61 people, not 13 as estimated by the government, died in the early hours of May 6, when law enforcers flushed several thousand Hefajat activists out of Shapla Chattar in Motijheel.

Charges were brought against Khan under Section-57 (1) and (2) of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, which states that publication of fake material on website or other electronic forms will be regarded as an offence if it "causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the State or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organization."

Meanwhile, DB police raided Odhikar's Gulshan office around 8:45pm in search of documents in connection with the case, and seized three laptops and two computers, said Obaidul Haque, senior

assistant commissioner of DB (north) Gulshan Zone.

Speaking at a press briefing at the DMP media office yesterday, Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), claimed that no lethal weapons, "only tear gas shells, sound grenades and boiled water were used to drive the Hefajat men out of the capital's important business centre."

Referring to the violent incidents in Palatan and Motijheel between May 5 morning and early hours of May 6, he said, "A total of 13 people, including police officials, transport workers and two pedestrians, died in those incidents."

On the pictures used in the report, Monirul said though Odhikar's report was based on the happenings of that night (early hours of May 6), some pictures were of those who died earlier in the day (May 5), and some were of people who are still alive.

Asked whether police had the authority to detain Khan without an arrest warrant, Monirul said though charges were brought against Khan under the ICT Act, he was arrested under section-54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Section-54 of the CrPC gives law enforcers the authority to arrest anyone on suspicion.

Khan was produced before the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Amit Kumar Dey around 2:30 pm. DB Inspector Ashraf Islam, also the investigating officer of the case, prayed for placing Khan on a 10-day remand.

Two officials of the Netherlands and the Swedish embassies were present at the court hearing.

The Netherlands was a donor in one of Odhikar's projects, an Odhikar official told The Daily Star.

Khan's counsel AJ Mohammad Ali appealed to the court for granting Khan bail and rejecting the remand prayer. He told the court that the allegations brought against his client were vague, as the report had been posted online months back.

Taskin Fahmina, senior researcher and programme coordinator of Odhikar, said when Khan returned home with his wife and two children by a private car around 10:30pm, eight men, identifying themselves as DB officials, forced their way through the gate of Khan's Gulshan house.

They didn't show any reason for the arrest. They only said they had instructions from higher authority to detain Khan, she added.

When Odhikar officials went to Gulshan Police Station to file a GD around 3:00am yesterday, police

refused to accept it, saying they were aware of Khan's detention by DB police, said Taskin.

She claimed that Adilur was deprived of his rights, as the law enforcers didn't file any case before arresting him.

Odhikar Director Nasiruddin Elan told The Daily Star on Saturday that DB police have been following the organisation's activities for several days.

The law enforcers had earlier called Khan to their office but he didn't go there, said Elan.

Speaking to journalists at his Secretariat office yesterday, Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir declined to comment on Khan's arrest.

He, however, said the law doesn't permit anyone to violate others' rights in the name of protecting human rights.

The minister said it was an offence to tarnish the country's image by indulging in propaganda in the name of human rights.

Expressing concern at the arrest of the Odhikar secretary, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night said Khan was arrested on the government's instructions.

Demanding his immediate release, the BNP chief in a statement said the arrest of the Odhikar secretary reflected the government's autocratic character.

Top Japanese

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agreement, plans have been drawn out to survey all factories to identify risks within the next two years and subsequently carry out reforms to improve working conditions, Fast Retailing said in a statement issued on August 8.

Fast Retailing on May 27 began its own investigation into fire and building safety at the factories of its manufacturing partners in Bangladesh, according to the statement.

It has already completed the probe, working with an independent third party and the findings are likely to be unveiled by November 2013, it says.

Witnessing the opportunities of business, Fast Retailing opened two outlets in Dhaka with the brand name Grameen UNIQLO in July under the social business model.

Meanwhile, IndustriALL Global Union in another statement said two meetings, scheduled to be held on August 11 and 12 on com-

pensating victims and their families for their losses in the November 2012 Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza collapse, had been postponed until September.

The meetings were supposed to take place in Dhaka to put together a full and fair compensation package. But now the meetings will be held in Geneva in September. The exact date has yet to be decided, the statement says.

"With the sudden illness of a key union official and a strike threat in Bangladesh, we feel that the meetings will be more fruitful at a later date," says IndustriALL General Secretary Jyrki Raina.

"All major brands and signatories are invited and we are expecting a high level of attendance."

The estimated long-term compensations to the victims of the Rana Plaza collapse amount to more than 54 million euros (\$71 million). For the Tazreen fire, the figure is 4.3 million euros (\$5.7 million), according to the statement.

GB chairman

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His resignation has put the government in an embarrassing situation, a senior minister told The Daily Star.

The government high-ups were annoyed by his resignation, as the ruling party has already been embroiled in controversy due to its treatment of the bank and its founder Prof Muhammad Yunus.

A Grameen Bank official close to Huq said the chairman was frustrated as he could not establish influence over the board of directors and his moves to give the government more control over the bank were foiled by nine borrower-directors.

Huq was also worried about his future as the chairman, the official said, requesting not to be named.

Banking Division Secretary M Aslam Alam said yesterday that they were awaiting a decision from Finance Minister AMA Muhith -- whether the resignation letter would be accepted, and a new chairman would be named.

Muhith had told private television station Channel i on Thursday that the resignation would be accepted and a new chairman would be appointed.

Huq could not be reached for comment, despite several attempts.

In media focus since his appointment, Huq hit newspaper headlines several times for controversial moves that many experts deemed unwarranted and

harmful to the microlender.

In September last year, he formed a five-member committee, without consulting the bank's nine borrower-directors, to appoint a managing director for the bank.

A recent move by the bank to advise the government to restructure the microcredit organisation also earned the authorities huge flak.

Huq recently kicked up controversy again by saying that an amount of at least Tk 10,000 crore was supposed to be transferred from Grameenphone to Grameen Bank through Grameen Telecom but the money never came.

In the absence of the chairman, no meeting of the board will be held, unless the government picks one from the current governing body to preside over such meetings.

Before joining Grameen Bank as its chairman on January 10, 2011, Huq served as the managing director of Enterprise Development Company Ltd, a private sector financial organisation.

Earlier between 1982 and 2003, he worked for the bank as a general manager and director for research, training, planning and special programmes.

Normally, the government appoints the chairman of Grameen Bank for three years. But when Huq was appointed, the finance ministry did not mention his tenure, an official of the bank said.

Jamaat's 48-hr
hartal from
tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP's key ally Jamaat-e-Islami will enforce a 48-hour countrywide hartal from tomorrow morning as the main opposition aims to step up street agitation for a non-partisan polls-time government.

Before the anti-government agitation programme generates political heat, Eid holidaymakers will have to face immense sufferings while returning to work places due to Jamaat's dawn-to-dusk hartal.

On August 1, Jamaat called the 48-hour shutdown from August 12 to protest a High Court verdict declaring illegal the party's registration with the Election Commission.

The sudden call for hartal at the end of Ramadan threw into uncertainty millions of home-goers' travel plans.

On August 6, the party deferred by a day the 48-hour hartal it called for August 12-13, leaving the Eid holidaymakers struggling again to reschedule their return trip.

BNP, however, has yet to decide whether it would extend support to Jamaat's 48-hour countrywide hartal.

"The party high commands will discuss it [the issue related to Jamaat's hartal] and announce its decision," Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, a BNP national standing committee member, told The Daily Star last night.

Party sources said the BNP chief would sit with her party's national standing committee members and top leaders of BNP-led alliance components on Wednesday and Thursday to finalise the alliance's next course of action.

While exchanging Eid greetings with journalists on Friday, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said her party led-opposition alliance would soon enforce agitation programmes.

The same day, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said different agitation programmes including series of hartal and road blockade will be enforced in the coming days.

The ruling Awami League leaders had already said in different programmes that they would also take to the streets to foil the opposition's "anarchy" in the name of agitation programmes.

NBR cuts VAT

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NBR claim of more than Tk 3,000 crore as VAT for SIM replacement from four mobile operators.

The tax authority has already formed a joint panel, with representatives from the telecom companies and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, to settle the issue.

Mojaheed

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him. The court sentenced him to death in connection with three charges, jailed him for life in one and sentenced him to five years in prison in another charge.

Tajul Islam and some other pro-Jamaat lawyers submitted a 95-page appeal along with 3,800 pages of documents on behalf of Mojaheed seeking his acquittal.

In the appeal, Mojaheed mentioned 115 grounds for which he should be acquitted.

After filing the appeal, Tajul told reporters that the verdict against his client was "not actually a judgement in the eye of the law". There was no element of charges of crimes against humanity and genocide brought against Mojaheed, Tajul argued.

The investigation officer did not find information of any case filed with any of the country's police stations against Mojaheed for committing crimes against humanity during the war in 1971, he added.

Tajul also said the investigation officer could not find any information of Mojaheed's involvement in any auxiliary force like AL-

Badr, Razakar, Al-Shams, and the Peace Committee, but the tribunal had addressed him as an Al-Badr commander.

Additional Attorney General and chief coordinator of the prosecution MK Rahman told The Daily Star that they were to decide about filing an appeal seeking death penalty for Mojaheed for the two other charges in which the convict was sentenced to imprisonment.

According to the verdict, Mojaheed had led a "death squad" named Al-Badr that worked as an auxiliary force for the Pakistani army.

He had held superior responsibility in abetting, planning and facilitating the mass killings of the "best sons and daughters of the soil".

In 1971, Mojaheed was a top leader of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat. Chhatra Sangha turned into Al-Badr, an armed outfit, the tribunal said.

Mojaheed was made a technocrat minister during the BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance rule in 2001-2006.

Nafis jailed for 30yrs

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York before the sentence was handed down, reports BBC.

Meanwhile, his father Quazi Ahsanullah in Bangladesh yesterday sought diplomatic support and assistance for Nafis' release.

Bangladesh foreign ministry officials, however, made it clear that the ministry or the embassy had no scope to make any diplomatic move for his release or reduce his punishment as the issue is under the US court's jurisdiction.

The US law or Geneva Convention does not permit any diplomatic move in this respect, the officials told The Daily Star.

Last year, Nafis, then 21, took dummy explosives to the central bank branch and tried to set them off using a mobile phone.

In February, he pleaded guilty to attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction and to supporting al-Qaeda.

However, he subsequently told the court he had rejected radical Islam. In a five-page letter to the

federal judge, he said "I'm ashamed. I'm lost ... I tried to do a terrible thing. I alone am responsible for what I've done. Please forgive me."

"I'm really grateful that the agents saved me. I apologise to you, your honour. I apologise to the people of America, I apologise to the people of New York, especially," he added.

The US District Court Judge Carol Amon handed down the sentence.

Nafis entered the US on a student visa in January 2012 where, according to prosecutors, he sought out al-Qaeda contacts in hopes of setting up a terrorist cell, reports AFP.

One of the individuals he tried to recruit was in fact an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which together with New York police put Nafis under tight surveillance.

Prosecutors said he proposed several targets, including a high-ranking US official and the New York Stock Exchange, before settling on the Federal Reserve building that holds one of the world's biggest

reserves of gold.

Posing as an al-Qaeda middleman, an FBI undercover agent set Nafis up with explosives to use in the purported attack -- unaware that the suspect's every word was being recorded as evidence against him.

On October 17, Nafis met the agent, travelled in a van to a warehouse, and finalised what he thought was a working 1,000 pound bomb that he armed on the drive to the intended target on busy Liberty Street.

Parking the van outside the Federal Reserve, Nafis walked to a hotel with the FBI agent, recorded a video claim of responsibility, then tried -- unsuccessfully -- to detonate the bomb with a cellphone.

It was at that instant that police arrested him.

"Nafis's goals of martyrdom and carnage were thwarted by the vigilance of law enforcement. He will now spend the next 30 years where his own actions have landed him -- in a federal prison cell," said US district attorney Loretta

Lynch.

When he was arrested in October last year, Nafis was described by his family in Dhaka as the only son of a senior bank executive who had dropped out of Bangladesh's most liberal university.

However, his family members could not be contacted over the phone yesterday.

Official sources said Nafis's father Ahsanullah yesterday met Mahfuzur Rahman, director general (Americas wing) of the foreign ministry, and requested him whether it was possible to take any diplomatic measure in favour of his son.

As per the US law, it is Nafis who only has the right to seek clemency or appeal to higher court, Mahfuzur told Ahsanullah.

Foreign ministry sources said Bangladesh embassy officials in Washington met thrice with Nafis since his arrest. But he did not cooperate with them.

Last time, he talked with the officials only for five minutes and left.

Biman faces

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But Biman was not even paying for the fuel it consumed after May 8, let alone the crores of taka it already owed, the officials added.

The national carrier paid Tk 37 crore against a bill of Tk 58 crore in May, Tk 36 crore against Tk 56 crore in June and Tk 30.07 crore against Tk 47 crore bills till July 24.

The fuel bills have actually been piling up since December 2007 when the government turned Biman Bangladesh Airlines into a public limited company.

Biman's non-payment of bills was putting extra strain on the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

An official at Padma Oil wishing anonymity said, "The BPC imports lubricants borrowing money from foreign lenders on high interest. It would not have to borrow or only borrow a small amount had Biman paid its dues."

Biman MD Steele could not immediately provide The Daily Star with the latest information about the dues. However, in an email, he admitted that he had a meeting with Padma officials in May and had made a commitment about paying regularly.

He also claimed that as far as he had been aware, the payments were being made regularly.

About the Padma Oil letter, Steele said he had not recently received any letter from Padma and gave an assurance that there would be no problem with fuel supplies during the hajj flights.

In the fiscal year 2012-13, Biman incurred a loss of Tk 606 crore, in 2011-12 Tk 545 crore, in 2010-2011 around Tk 200 crore, in 2009-10 Tk 80 crore.

Biman made a small profit in 2008-09.

As of last April, Biman also owed Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Tk 367.62 crore.