

MONEY EMBEZZLEMENT

Action against Destiny underway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Action against officials of 30 multipurpose cooperative societies including Destiny was underway in connection with money embezzlement, State Minister for LGRD Mashiur Rahaman Ranga told the House yesterday.

Replying to a lawmaker's query during a question-answer session, Ranga on behalf of LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashraf Islam said investigation against the multipurpose cooperative societies had already completed.

"In line with the investigation report, the process of taking actions against staff and officials of the cooperative societies is now underway," he added. He also placed a list of the 30 multipurpose societies that allegedly embezzled money from the people.

Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd alone has allegedly embezzled around Tk 1,449 crore.

Replying to a supplementary ques-

tion, the state minister said clients of Destiny would get back their money.

"They [clients] will get back the money one day. The money was not siphoned off anywhere yet. Its property is now under our watch," he added.

In response to another lawmaker's question, Ranga said polls to the Dhaka city corporations -- North and South -- would be held after resolving demarcation complexities.

Replying to another question, the LGRD minister in written informed the House that high levels of arsenic [more than 50 ppb] were found in 29 percent of the deep tube-wells tested in the country's 271 upazilas.

"Water of 50 lakh deep tube-wells in 271 upazilas was tested. Excessive arsenic contamination [over 50 ppb] was found in 29 percent or 14.5 lakh deep tube-wells," he added.

The government was conducting tests in 32 arsenic-prone areas in the country and the tests would be completed by 2016, he added.

Farmer killed

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On information, Hela Heng Mong, sector commander of Border Guard Bangladesh, Dinajpur, along with Zahedur Rashid, commanding officer of 29 Battalion headquarters in Phulbari, rushed to the spot.

Around 2:30pm, Yaswan Singh, DIG of Raiganj and Rajan Sood, CO of 96 BSF Battalion, visited the area.

Witnesses said there was an exchange

of heated arguments between the BCB and the BSF men over the killing. BSF men claimed they shot the Bangladeshi inside Indian territory.

The BSF said it would return the body after an autopsy, Hela Heng Mong said. The BSF, he added, would also form a probe committee to investigate the incident and take actions against those involved.

Khaleda sued

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submit the probe report within a month.

Magistrate Atikur Rahman of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court gave the order in response to a case filed against Khaleda and BNP leaders Rafiqul Islam Mia, Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury and pro-BNP intellectual Prof Emajuddin Ahmed.

AB Siddique, president of Bangladesh Jananetri Parishad, a pro-Awami League organisation, filed the case with the CMM court.

In the complaint, Siddique claimed: "Khaleda Zia masterminded the incidents of killing while the rest instigated the incidents."

Sanaullah Mia, one of the counsels and advisers of Khaleda, said the BNP chief had been continuing the agitation programme in a peaceful manner.

She is virtually confined to her Gulshan office and is not involved in arson attacks on public transport, he said, adding: "The case was filed to harass her."

Earlier, Khaleda has been accused in three more cases filed by police --

two with Jatrabari Police Station and the other with Chaudhagram Police Station in Comilla -- of masterminding the arson attacks on public transport during the countrywide blockade.

All the three cases are now under police investigation.

Amid such a situation, the new case was filed against Khaleda and three others with the CMM court around 10:00 am yesterday.

After an hour, the magistrate recorded the statement of AB Siddique and took cognizance of the charges against Khaleda and others.

In his petition, Siddique said the BNP-led 20-party men threw petrol bombs at transports and blasted crude bombs during the non-stop movement, leaving 42 people killed and hundreds injured.

He also appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants against Khaleda and three others and send them to jail.

Talking to The Daily Star, Siddique said he had declared a 'jihad' against Khaleda and others to bring them to book for their alleged involvement in such heinous offences committed since January 5.

Smugglers within

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pilots and 34 cabin crews of the national flag carrier, fled the country after five people were arrested over gold smuggling on November 18 last year.

Three of the five are Biman top dogs. They are Captain Abu Mohammad Aslam Shaheed, chief of planning and scheduling, Emdad Hossain, deputy general manager (flight services), and Tozammel Hossain, manager (scheduling).

The absence of the 44 officials badly affected flight operations and tarnished the government's image abroad, the report added.

Asked about this, Biman General Manager of Public Relations Khan Musharraf Hossain said none of their employees fled the country.

The cabin crews were posted outside the country at the time of the November 18 arrests, he said, adding, "It's not right to call them fugitives."

This newspaper could not verify either claim fully, but found several Biman employees stopped coming to work.

According to the report, about 80 percent of the gold smugglers in the country are based in Chittagong.

Gold enters Bangladesh directly from Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Oman or via Singapore and Malaysia. But Bangladesh is not the final destination -- it is only a route to smuggle the yellow metal through land ports to India, where gold is used particularly in weddings and religious festivals.

Unscrupulous Biman officials get Tk 1,000 to 1,500 for each 10-tola gold bar to pass through airports. The gold is smuggled through Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka, Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong and Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

Of the 30 syndicates involved, 23 operate inside the country and the rest from outside.

Of the 23 rings at home, 11 are directly involved in gold smuggling and 12 are smuggling gold with money exchange as front business.

And of the 11 directly involved, seven are active at Shahjalal International Airport, three at Shah Amanat International Airport and one at Osmani International Airport.

The rackets are backed by some political leaders and top officials in the police and Border Guard Bangladesh, the report said.

"They are so powerful that they always remain beyond the reach of law enforcement agencies," said a detective who deals with gold smuggling cases.

In all, some 5,000 people are involved in the smuggling as facilitators, middlemen or carriers. They are located in the capital, Chittagong and different bordering districts, including Sathkira, Jessore, Jhenidah, Kushtia and Chuadanga.

In recent months, detectives and customs officials arrested at least four suspected syndicate members from the capital. Of them, Sheikh Md Ali used sweetmeat trade as cover while Saleh Ahmed, Nazrul Islam Liton and Shamsuddin used money exchange business, according to the report.

Usually, the syndicates use Biman flights for smuggling because its aircraft are kept at the airport in Dhaka longer and are often taken to the hangars for maintenance, allowing them sufficient time to offload gold.

In some recent large hauls, 124kg, 105kg and 32kg of smuggled gold was found in hidden places and chambers of Biman aircraft, just like yesterday's haul.

Earlier in October last year, the

National Board of Revenue found 14 people, including 10 staff of Biman's engineering section and an Indian and a Nepali citizen, involved in the smuggling of 124kg of gold in 2013.

Contacted, Biman's newly appointed Managing Director Kyle Heywood said, "The authorities and the airline will swiftly take all necessary action against any individual responsible when it has been proven that inappropriate and illegal activity has taken place."

But he would not elaborate on the matter as it is being investigated.

According to the intelligence report, infighting between smugglers is the reason behind the frequent gold seizures at airports of late.

The journey

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Chandika Hathurusingha, practiced hard to acclimatise to the conditions.

"We will field thirteen players in the match and the team is looking forward to finding the right combination from the practice matches for the first match against Afghanistan on February 18," informed team manager Khaled Mahmud over phone yesterday.

"The win here will give the boys confidence and they are looking forward to making the most from the practice games," he added.

Opener Tamim Iqbal will not feature in the match despite making good progress with his fitness levels, while one pace bowler will not get the opportunity to play the first practice game.

Bangladesh will play their second unofficial practice match against the same opponents on Thursday with Australia captain Michael Clarke featuring.



FUNNY

PHOTO: KANGKON KARMAKER



READER'S eye

Life has its own bloopers and oops. They all make our life colourful and fun-filled. Now pick up your mobile phone and click. Capture the funny side of life and send those to starreaderseye@gmail.com. We will share your lighter moments with others.



LOST IN TRANSLATION ... If they go by this milestone, Bangla speaking people will have to travel 10km more than English speaking ones to get to Parbatipur. The actual distance is 10km. The erroneous milestone stands at Mostafapur between Dinajpur and Parbatipur.



Pakistani diplomat withdrawn

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diplomat was directly involved in collecting and smuggling fake Indian currency.

An intelligence agency took the lead and probed to unearth that Mujibur and another Bangladeshi Jalil Akhter took part in counterfeit Indian currency collection, its distribution at home and smuggling to India. And both were in close contact with Mazhar.

According to the intelligence report, Mazhar have close ties also with some ex-army and police officers, some teachers of Dhaka University and other universities, officers of Pakistan International Airlines, different businessmen and a section of Bangladeshi nationals residing in bordering areas of Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon, Jessore and Benapole.

The report read most of the Bangladeshi nationals having links with Mazhar were engaged in the activities of various militant organisations in the country.

According to official sources, intelligence agencies learnt that the earnings through the fake currency scam were given to militant outfits like Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Ansarullah Bangla Team and Jamaat-Shibir axis for various sabotage acts. The Burdwan blast is

such an act of terror.

The intelligence report, obtained by The Daily Star, read that Mazhar Khan and Mujibur were detained by police at Banani Maitree market around 6:30pm on January 12 when the two met secretly.

Mazhar tore down some documents just at the time of being detained. From the pieces of papers, police found some Bangladeshi passport numbers and names of three people who were directly involved with Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The duo was taken to Banani Police Station for interrogation. Later around 10:00pm, First Secretary of Pakistan high commission Samina Mahtab rushed to the police station and took away Mazhar.

Mujibur, who remained in police custody, told interrogators that he was acquainted with Mazhar through the latter's predecessor.

In the last eight to 10 years, Mujibur travelled to Pakistan 20 times, India 11 times and Thailand 22 times. On the latest occasion, Mazhar had given Mujibur 1.80 lakh fake Indian rupees to circulate.

Over the last two years of his "diplomatic assignment" in Dhaka, Mazhar was busy implementing various ISI agenda, including anti-state subversive activities. He reportedly created his network in Bangladesh by abusing his

diplomatic identity.

Arresting Pakistani citizen and seizing fake Indian currency have become common phenomena. In 2012, some members of Laskhar-e-Taiba were arrested with foreign currency of Tk 10 crore. Three of them were Pakistanis.

Pakistani citizens Md Danish, Sabbir and Bangladesh Fatema Akhtar were arrested with 10 lakh fake Indian rupee on January 18 last year. And on January 21, a Bangladeshi citizen named Zahid Hasan was arrested with 50 thousand forged Indian notes.

This year, Pakistani national Mohammad Imran was arrested at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on January 15 with 80 lakh fake Indian rupee. He came to Bangladesh allegedly with fake passport and visa.

Sumon, a fake currency trader, was arrested with 90 thousand Saudi riyal at Jatrabari in the capital on February 8 and Abdul Mannan Hawlader, an Indian national, was arrested with 10 thousand Indian rupee at Gulistan on February 10.

A few days later, three active members of counterfeit currency racket -- Abdur Rahim alias Badsha, 48, Mehedi Hasan and Rabeya Akhter Sathi -- were busted with fake Bangladeshi and Indian notes worth Tk 3.03 lakh and Rs 54 thousand.

Envoys of China, Canada call on president

UNB, Dhaka

New Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ma Mingqiang presented his credentials to President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban yesterday.

Welcoming the envoy, Hamid thanked China for its continued assistance for various key development projects in Bangladesh, President's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

In response, Ma Mingqiang assured that China would continue its support for the economic development.

Later in the day, New Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Benoit-Pierre Laramée presented his credentials to the President at Bangabhaban.

Welcoming the envoy, Hamid wished the high commissioner all the best and expressed hope that the relations between the two countries would reach a new height during his tenure.

In response, Benoit-Pierre Laramée said Canada would continue to co-operate Bangladesh in its endeavour to be a middle-income country.

Another major

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hours, said customs intelligence officials.

"A smuggling ring brought in this stash. The arrival of the aircraft two hours ahead of schedule was their tactic to dodge the intelligence agencies at the airport," Nojibur Rahman chairman of the National Board of Revenue, told reporters at the airport.

He added that a vested quarter in league with the smuggling gang carelessly stashed the gold inside the aircraft. Some unscrupulous Biman officials and staff might also have been involved, he suspected.

Soon after the passengers got off, the aircraft was taken to the bay area so that the smuggled gold could be safely taken out, reckoned customs intelligence officials.

The officials with the help of Biman technicians unscrewed a part of the mirror panel of a toilet and seized 180 gold bars and 114 chains. They also had to unscrew another chamber door where 120 gold bars were kept, while 185 more were seized from a chamber for life jackets.

"Nobody can hide gold bars in such places inside an aircraft without the help of Biman technicians," said Moinul Khan, director general of Customs Intelligence and Investigations.

"Even skilled technicians are needed to remove gold bars from such places," he added.

Though the customs intelligence could not arrest anyone in this connection, they found involvement of two people. The officials, however, would not divulge the names.

A three-member committee headed by a deputy director of the customs intelligence has been formed to probe the incident. The committee has been asked to submit its report within 10 working days.

More than 1,000 kg gold was seized at the country's airports in last one year alone.

Some 160 cases have been filed in the last four years against over 200 people, mostly carriers, in the capital. But not a single case has been disposed of, police and court sources say.

Good opportunity

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taken in favour of Bangladesh. It rather appears that the Kingdom did so to benefit its own economy as well as reaping the comparative advantage of hiring workers from a country [Bangladesh] that does not really negotiate higher pay for its deprived workers.

On the other hand, India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have set various terms and conditions, including pay hike and improved work environment, on their migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, home to some 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers.

India has recently demanded the Saudi government raise minimum wages for its migrants to Saudi Riyals 1,500.

The most important demand for Bangladesh, on the contrary, was not salary hike or improved work conditions; it was rather to ensure that workers are recruited in more numbers because they send home the much-needed remittance, the second biggest economic pillar of the country's economy after the garment industry.

Considering Bangladesh's compliance, one cannot but wonder why the Kingdom still had put a restriction on hiring workers from Bangladesh. Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, the then Saudi labour minister, had told the media that the ban was under a new policy that, among other objectives, aimed to strike a balance among the various nationalities working in the Kingdom.

It is not clear whether those objectives have been achieved by now.

Another view behind the restriction was that many Bangladeshi workers were "illegal" and involved in criminal activities, and that the Saudi media had flared up the issue, creating a public outcry then.

Bangladesh Expatriates' Welfare Ministry officials and migration experts say that a large number of Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia were illegal, which was a result of ram-

pant corruption among manpower brokers and recruiting agencies both in Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia.

Each Bangladeshi worker going to Saudi Arabia has to spend up to Tk 8 lakh as migration cost, industry insiders say.

Manpower brokers secure visas from the Saudi employers and sell those to the brokers or recruiting agents in Bangladesh at higher prices, which raise migration cost. When a migrant fails to get salaries commensurate with his migration and other costs, he changes jobs, which is when he becomes illegal.

It is not unlikely that some Bangladeshi migrant workers are engaged in petty crimes. Such crimes should be punished as per the laws of the land but they should not cause a recruitment ban.

Average monthly salary for low-skilled Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia ranges from 800 to 1,000 Saudi Riyals [\$216-\$270] while it is above 1,200 Riyals for the Indians.

These data well explain the roots of Bangladesh's labour problems in the Kingdom.

Now that a Saudi delegation is expected to visit Bangladesh shortly to set the modalities of recruitment, both the countries need to be sincere while devising ways to eliminate visas trading and reduce migration cost.

Bangladesh's role is vital here. The authorities need to ensure that each worker going to Saudi Arabia for a job is well-trained, aware of the laws of the land, and is not predisposed to any kind of criminal behaviour.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia also needs to have regulations to ensure that migrant workers get regularly paid, and are not exploited and forced to step into any crimes.

We do hope implementation of these measures will prevent the repetition of recruitment bans.