

COAL POWER PROJECT ACC arrests 3 over Tk 19cr embezzlement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday arrested three persons, including two government staff, in a case accusing them and 32 others of allegedly misappropriating Tk 19.82 crore from the Matarbari coal-fired power project in 2014.

Moreover, ACC is planning to file a case against an employee of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) for not mentioning of having spent Tk 14 lakh in his tax return.

Mohammad Fakhru Islam, the then surveyor at the Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner's (DC) Office and at present stationed at the Chittagong DC office, was arrested in Chatteshwari road of Chittagong by ACC Deputy Director Syed Ahmed.

Abul Kashem Majumdar, a clerk at the Cox's Bazar DC Office, and advocate Nur Mohammad Sikdar were arrested by the same in Cox's Bazar.

The statement of the case filed with Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station on December 7, 2014 says the accused got around Tk 46.24 crore sanctioned as compensation for acquiring land, showing 25 non-existent shrimp

enclosures in Cox's Bazar.

The accused drew Tk 19.82 crore through 20 cheques and attempted to misappropriate another Tk 3.49 crore, reads the statement.

RAJUK EMPLOYEE

Md Khairuzzaman stated of spending Tk 1.35 crore for his six-storied building in the capital's Uttara -- Tk 11 lakh for the three-katha plot on Road 10 in Sector 10 allotted to him through a Rajuk scheme in 2005 and the rest behind the construction.

However his wealth statement submitted to ACC says the figure is Tk 1,08,26,250.

ACC Deputy Director Abu Nasir in an inquiry beginning on July 18, 2016 found out from Public Works Department that the amount should have been Tk 1,49,79,725, ACC Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharjee told The Daily Star.

Khairuzzaman, who joined Rajuk around 20 years back as a building inspector and is now the authorised officer of zone-2, claims the building is still under construction, for which the amount he mentioned was lower than what ACC found.

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Thousands of people use this 20-year-old rickety bamboo bridge over the Chhetra river in Brahmanbaria's Sarail upazila. People of two unions cross the 1,000-foot bridge on foot and on bicycles and bikes. They have been demanding a concrete bridge there for long but the authorities have not taken any steps yet.

Selective use of law

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sheet to court which issued arrest warrant against Baten and others.

For him, the legal bar on resumption of office was not applied.

But the treatment was not the same in case of mayors loyal to the BNP through the legal provision on suspension of mayors and councillors of city corporations and municipalities are the same.

Take the case of Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, pro-BNP mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation.

He won the 2013 mayoral polls by defeating the AL-backed candidate.

But he was suspended on May 7, 2015 after courts accepted charge sheets against him in three cases, including one for the murder of police constable Siddhartha Sarker.

Apart from Bulbul, 22 RCC councillors were accused and charge-sheeted in the three cases. But none of the councillors had to experience what the mayor did.

Bulbul filed a writ petition with the High Court, challenging the legality of the suspension order and won the battle. The HC declared his suspension illegal. The government then moved to the Supreme Court which upheld the

HC verdict on March 5 this year.

In its verdict, the apex court said it found arbitrary exercise of discretionary power in case of Bulbul's suspension.

The HC judgment, upheld by the SC, said, "But the government has opted not to suspend those councillors. Such an action against the writ-petitioner [Bulbul] is no doubt discriminatory and arbitrary."

The HC also asked the LGRD ministry to take necessary steps to bring to the notice of the government authorities concerned and parliament the issue of amending the provision on suspension of mayors and councillors of city corporations.

It asked for incorporating necessary guidelines for building an objective opinion so that the authorities may take a fair, reasonable and equitable decision on suspension of an elected mayor or councillor of a city corporation.

In the appeal, the attorney general, on behalf of the government, drew the apex court's attention to the HC directive on amending the provision, and said one organ of state cannot give such directive to another organ of state.

The SC didn't reject the necessity of bringing amendment to the provision on suspension. It, however, said, "The above direction is a pious wish of the court. The government and the parliament may consider amending the section."

The section-12 of the Local Government (City Corporation) Act empowers the government to suspend temporarily a mayor or councillor after court accepts a charge sheet in a criminal case against him or her.

The government has not made any move to amend the provision that provides it with unfettered powers to suspend a mayor or councillor.

The LGRD ministry rather exercised the power on Sunday and suspended Bulbul again, saying a Rajshahi court accepted the charge sheet against him in a case filed under the Explosive Substances Act.

The charge sheet, however, was accepted on June 22 last year.

Robiul Islam, a RCC councillor, was also charge-sheeted in the same case. But he has not been suspended.

Bulbul was all set to rejoin office on Sunday after winning the legal battle. But he found his office under lock and key. When he managed to

enter the office after a five-hour wait, he was informed within minutes that he had been suspended again.

Like him, Sylhet Mayor Ariful Huq Chowdhury and Habiganj Municipality Mayor GK Gaus had almost similar experience in the last couple of years.

They were suspended on January 7, 2015 after a Sylhet court accepted charge sheets against them in two cases -- one under the Explosive Substances Act and the other for the killing of former Finance Minister AMS Kibria.

Later, both won legal battles against their suspension.

But the two were suspended by the LGRD ministry for the second time on Sunday, around 10 days after a special tribunal in Sunamganj accepted the revised charge sheet against them in the case over a grenade attack on a rally of AL leader Suranjit Sengupta in Sunamganj in 2004.

Over the last couple of years, a large number of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami-backed mayors, chairmen and vice chairmen of local government bodies were suspended under two specific clauses of the Local Government (City Corporation) Act.

While enforcing the Act, the LGRD

ministry's Local Government Division has all along been strict about the elected representatives backed by the BNP and the Jamaat.

Contacted yesterday, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said the provision on suspension of mayors and councillors should spell out the criteria for suspending an elected representative to prevent abuse of power.

Meanwhile, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the prime minister was not aware of suspension of the mayors of Rajshahi and Sylhet cities and Habiganj municipality.

"It is the LGRD ministry's jurisdiction to suspend mayors. Since the ministry made the decision, it can better say the reason and logic behind it. As far as I know, the prime minister doesn't know about such a major policy decision," he told journalists after inaugurating a road in the capital's Demra, reports UNB.

Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, claimed that there was no political motive behind suspension of the mayors.

Talking to this newspaper, advocate Khurshid Alam Khan said the legal provision on suspension of elected representatives of local govern-

ment bodies is discriminatory, as lawmakers don't face such consequences if they are charge-sheeted in criminal cases.

Ruling AL MP Amanur Rahman Rana is a charge-sheeted accused in a murder case, and is now in jail. But he retains his parliament membership.

Another AL lawmaker, Abdur Rahman Bodi, has been convicted and jailed by a court for three years in a corruption case. He is now on bail and retains his membership of the House.

Disaster Management Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya was convicted by a court in 2008. He was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in a corruption case.

Upon his appeal, the HC scrapped the conviction. But the SC cancelled the HC verdict and asked it to hear afresh his appeal.

Maya still remains a parliament member and a minister.

"A lawmaker should be suspended temporarily after court accepts charge sheet in a criminal case filed against him or her," said Khurshid.

[Our Rajshahi and Pabna correspondents contributed to this report]

Other side of Saudi women

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Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (the "Vision") and the National Transformation Program set out an ambitious roadmap for education reforms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was established in 1932.

Success of the Vision depends largely on reforms in the education system generating a better basis for employment of the young Saudis.

"We find that the main focus of the Vision is on women and young people and how to improve the lives of our citizens," observed Al-Helaissi.

Educating women in Saudi Arabia is a relatively new phenomenon. Women education started in 1962. In 1970, literacy rates for women stood at just two percent.

But the KSA now boasts a female literacy rate of 91 percent and the government has been claiming to have almost completely eradicated illiteracy from the younger generations of women.

"We have managed through over the

years to eradicate illiteracy of women. Most of the women graduates have obtained master's degrees and PhDs from the universities. Their level is higher than the men," she said.

"So, as far as education is concerned, we are up there with some of the best countries."

Available records show Saudi women are studying in various fields, including education, social sciences, arts, business, law, engineering, natural sciences, agriculture, medicine and the service sector.

They are also studying in around 60 countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA and different European countries. The number of Saudi women studying abroad in 2014 was more than 35,000, according to the education ministry's data released in 2015.

Saudi men have long benefited from the government's study abroad schemes. When King Abdullah came to power in 2005, he implemented an

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overseas scholarship programme for the first time that included women.

At present, women are said to make up at least 20 percent of the scholarship recipients.

The Saudi MP also spoke about social

changes in her country. She said a lot of young women are getting married later than before, so if the average age was 18 before, it is now 25 or 26 and some get married as late as 29 or 30.

"We have smaller families. We do not have anymore 10-12 children in the families. Now we have more three-four. So, the family unit is getting smaller. All these are pushing women to get back to the mainstream of the society," she asserted.

Saudi women who got the right to education four decades ago have recently got their political rights as well.

The KSA became the last country so far to grant women franchise in 2011 and also allowed them to contest local government polls. New Zealand was the first country to give women the legal right to vote in 1893.

For the first time in the history of KSA, women contested municipal elections in 2015 and 12 women also came out successful.

In 2013, King Abdullah took

another groundbreaking move by announcing that 30 women would be appointed as members of the 160-members Majlis Ash-Shura to sit together with men there.

The King appointed 30 women and they were sworn in as MPs in February 2013.

Hoda Al-Helaissi was one of them. She has been appointed again on expiry of her four-year tenure. She is now a deputy of the chairperson of the foreign affairs committee in the Shura Council.

For the first time, Saudi Arabia celebrated the International Women's Day this year. Members of the royal family took part in a programme in Riyadh in a bid to fight for women's rights.

Women are still denied many basic rights including freedom of movement, Al-Helaissi said, adding that stereotyping of Saudi Arabia has reached a point and it is very difficult to answer this question.

She, however, claims the reality was very far from the truth everyone knows. "We have a voice. We are very vocal. We are very well respected in our society. That does not mean there are no abuses."

"Obviously, in any country, you will find abuses. But the point is that women do have a voice and they do have the rights mainly because Islam gives us that right before anything else.

"Now the result of the stereotyping, as we are known by the rest of the world, always creates a gap and this gap is filled by unrealities, by fictions. This is how it has been created. I think if anybody comes to Saudi Arabia, they would be very pleasantly surprised to see a different picture," she observed.

In her views, change takes time. It takes time according to the country in question. "Never impose a value system that works in one country because that value will not work in another country. Every country has its own values and cultures."

2 cops from Maldives in Rajshahi

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inspector of DB of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

They are likely to visit the scene, talk to the girl's family members and local police officials, he said, adding that they came to the district at the request of Raudha's family to the Maldivian government via the country's embassy in Dhaka.

The two police officials were staying at Rajshahi Circuit House.

The police in the Maldives on March 31 tweeted that they were maintaining contact with the family of Raudha and the authorities in Bangladesh. "There have been a lot of speculations in the local media about the ongoing investigation into the death of a Maldivian woman in Bangladesh."

Raudha, a second-year student of Islami Bank Medical College, was found dead in her room at the women's dormitory of the college in Nawdapara area of Rajshahi city on March 29.

Her autopsy report said she killed herself by hanging. However, her family members rejected the report

and said they were considering seeking a second autopsy.

They keep insisting that it was a murder.

Initially, Shah Makhdum police were dealing with the case but it was later transferred to the DB in Rajshahi and Inspector Rashidul was assigned to do the investigation.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Raudha's younger brother Rayyan Athif said they sought help from the Maldivian government after suspecting that someone else was using the Instagram profile of his sister. "At one point, the profile was deleted all together probably to hide evidence."

Raudha's phone, seized by the police, remained inaccessible till last night. However, Inspector Rashidul said he took the mobile phone of one of the classmates of Raudha to his office. "We haven't seized it, we are just examining it," he said.

Meanwhile, Raudha's mother Aminath Muharrimath has brought an allegation against the same girl, who is also a foreign student.

She alleged a couple of weeks before

her daughter's death, the girl mixed some sleeping pills with Raudha's juice.

"Normally Raudha used to study with her but one night she told me that she was studying alone. After I asked her what had happened, she told me that she doesn't trust her anymore," said Muharrimath.

Contacted, the girl, however, refuted the allegation. "I did make the juice but there was nothing in that. I believe Raudha never said anything like that to anyone."

She also said she was the first person to notice Raudha hanging from the ceiling fan in her room. She then called other students at the dormitory and one of them brought down the body, thinking Raudha was still alive.

Inspector Rashidul said the girl in question also accompanied Raudha to the hospital in Rajshahi city after the Maldivian girl felt sick the night before she was found dead.

The girl said she took Raudha to the hospital that night at the request of one of their classmates.

Muhith hints at \$5b

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to be discussed during PM's five-day visit to India from Friday.

Asked about media reports on the possibility of a defence cooperation deal between the two neighbouring countries, he said India might offer such an agreement but it would be discussed upon Hasina's return to Bangladesh before making a decision.

Meanwhile, India has accepted Bangladesh's proposal to establish road connectivity with the Terai region of Nepal through territories of India and Bhutan. Terai shares border with the eastern Indian state of Bihar. Once the road connectivity with Bhutan using Jalpaiguri of West Bengal is set up, it will reduce the distance between Bangladesh and the Himalayan kingdom to just 30 miles.

Replying to a question, Muhith said Bangladesh had decided to bear 10 percent of the total cost of a proposed 1,000 MW hydro power plant to be set up in Bhutan in collaboration with India.

According to him, the project site will be close to Bhutan's border with India so that electricity can be easily transmitted to Bangladesh without

much system loss.

Power consumption in Bangladesh has gone up from 3,000 MW in 2010 to 13,000 MW at present and Bangladesh, being a power-deficit country, is keen on tapping into the enormous hydro power potential of Nepal and Bhutan.

Bangladesh wants to generate 24,000 MW power from its own sources in the next three years, Muhith said, adding that the government is now focusing on improving its electricity transmission system to lower the system loss from 11 percent at present to 7-8 percent.

Earlier, addressing the meeting of South Asia Sub Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries, Muhith said the challenge for the region was not only to ensure sustainable economic growth but also to make sure that the success was equally shared among member countries.

Despite development efforts in the past, an estimated 800 million people in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka still live in extreme poverty.

SASEC aims at aligning the eco-

nomical corridors being developed in member countries with cross-border links in order to maximise the developmental impact of investments. Bangladesh, Muhith said, is discussing two major corridors -- Banglabandha-Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox Bazar, and Sylhet-Dhaka-Khulna-West Bengal.

Bangladesh, he said, has the potential to become a transport and transshipment centre for the South Asian Sub Region due to its geographical location, as it borders India and Myanmar and is close to landlocked countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Kunming, the key transportation hub in South West China.

"Further improvement of the multimodal connectivity will lead to enhanced economic cooperation among the countries of this region," Muhith said.

Chairing the meeting, Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley welcomed Myanmar as the seventh full member of SASEC and said that with Myanmar joining the initiative, the grouping will facilitate a "credible link" between South Asia and South East Asia.