

GRAFT ALLEGATION ACC summons ex-FBCCI chief AK Azad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has summoned former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) AK Azad to its office for quizzing over allegations of amassing wealth illegally.

ACC Director Mir Mohammad Jainul Abedin signed the summons which was issued yesterday asking Azad to appear before ACC's Segunbagicha office in the capital around 10:00am on April 3.

Azad is now serving as the managing director of the country's leading conglomerate Ha-Meem Group that owns two media outlets.

Passengers shun Biman after debacle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Saidpur-bound plane of Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday flew with only seven passengers after Tuesday's technical glitch in a Biman flight on the same domestic route and a subsequent seven-hour delay and then cancellation.

The return flight-BG 493 of Bombardier Dash-8, a 74-seater aircraft, however flew 27 passengers back to Dhaka, Abu Ahmed, district manager of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, told The Daily Star.

On Tuesday, a Biman flight to Saidpur had to return to Dhaka within fifteen minutes of take-off from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport following a technical issue. The plane, a Bombardier Dash-8, took off with 67 passengers at 12:28pm but returned at 12:50pm, an air-traffic controller said.

Biman authorities finally cancelled the flight after around seven hours. This left 74 Dhaka-bound passengers stranded in Saidpur.

Biman officials blame airport authorities of Saidpur not keeping open the airport for an additional 30 to 50 minutes after its scheduled closing time of 8:00pm for this. There were children, elderly and sick passengers who had been at the airport for more than nine hours. The flight itself is of around 50 minutes duration.

The Saidpur-bound Biman flight yesterday reached around 9:30am and the return flight reached HSI around 10:45am.

Although the national airliner's yesterday's Dhaka-Saidpur-Dhaka flight seems to have got very poor response from passengers, the three private airlines operating on the route -- Novo Air, Regent and US-Bangla Airlines -- flew in mostly full-capacity, sources said.

A total of nine flights are operated on the Dhaka-Saidpur route each day.

A war for oil

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was covered up with a blue curtain printed with UN logo.

UN officials denied they were intentionally hiding the piece of art that made a symbolic statement about the horrors of war and the art of diplomacy. But it was a statement after all. That diplomacy had lost, war had won.

Colin Powell stated during his presentation: "We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction; he's determined to make more. Given Saddam Hussein's history of aggression ... given what we know of his terrorist associations and given his determination to exact revenge on those who oppose him, should we take the risk that he will not some day use these weapons at a time and the place and in the manner of his choosing at a time when the world is in a much weaker position to respond? The United States will not and cannot run that risk to the American people. Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11 world."

A little over a month later, on 20 March, the Iraq invasion was launched with a bombing of the presidential palace at Baghdad that would eventually tear asunder Iraq, the middle East and indeed the world and kill an estimated 151,000 to 600,000 Iraqis in the first 3-4 years of conflict, and injure and maim many thousands. There were 21 days of major combat operation. But it was only the beginning of an endless war.

A WAR FOR OIL

Much after the invasion was complete, and even much after, in some estimations, about a million lives, mostly innocent, were lost, it is now clear that the Iraq war was not about Saddam Hussein's alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Saddam actually did not possess any such weapons. But then why was this massive and indiscriminate attack launched that left the over 5,000-year-old civilisation in ruins and mired in sectarian violence?

The answer, in short, is oil. Secret memos and piles of other evidences suggest the war was actually to exploit Iraq's huge oil reserves, second in the world after Saudi Arabia at a proven 115 billion barrels that would probably well be the largest deposit as suggested by big oil companies and Iraqi officials.

WHY IS IRAQ OIL SO ATTRACTIVE?

It is not only the vast quantity but quality also that makes Iraq's oil of special attraction. It commands premium price in the world market because of its high carbon content, lightness and low sulfur content.

Iraq today possesses about 11% of the world's total oil reserve. The Energy Information Administration of the US Department of Energy has indicated that Iraqi reserves could possibly total over 400 billion barrels with new explorations.

Iraqi oil production cost is also one of the lowest in the world. Its wells are vast and oil is found at a shallow depth at high pressure. This makes oil exploration much cheaper than any other



Former US secretary of state Colin Powell speaks at the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

country except Saudi Arabia. While it costs about \$1-\$1.5 to produce one barrel of Iraqi oil, it costs about \$5 to extract Omani or Malaysian oil. For Mexico or Russia the cost runs even higher at around \$6-8 a barrel.

So Iraq remains a prized jewel for oil majors with recoverable oil worth about \$3.125 trillion. If under the new law, the exploration companies split this volume 50/50 with the government, their profit a year would run up to \$29 billion.

Gas, though not as plentiful as oil, is nevertheless a no less a factor. In 1996, Gaz de France and ENI of Italy formed a consortium to lay a pipeline from Iraq to Turkey for supply to Europe. But ultimately this project could not go through because of UN sanctions against Iraq.

OIL POLITICS

The pull of Iraq's lucrative oil reserves coincided with the goal of the US National Security Policy that defines free flow of oil to America as a priority that must be ensured even with military might, if necessary. President George Bush, the first, had put this down very clearly as did President Bill Clinton. It was further strengthened by Bush, the second. His vice president Dick Cheney, who also co-owns oil services firm Halliburton that bagged huge contracts in Iraq after the invasion, summed up US security strategy as ensuring "diverse and free supply of oil".

Such a policy obviously necessitated a close and symbiotic relationship between the government machinery and the oil companies that can be traced back to the time of the famous John D Rockefeller who owned Standard Oil.

Rockefeller, in his 1909 memoir "Random Reminiscences of Men and Events" wrote: "One of our greatest helpers has been the State Department. Our ambassadors and ministers and consuls have aided to push our way into new markets in the utmost corners of the world."

The Second World War made the case for oil even more urgent as the US broke its policy of isolation in global affairs and joined the war. Uninterrupted oil supply became the key to winning the war and both the Germans and the allies started bombing each other's

supply ships and securing oil fields in the Arabian Peninsula. Both the US and the UK competed to gain primacy in the newly-discovered Saudi Arabian oil fields. Excluded from the main grounds, the French zeroed in on the African oil with coups, murders, bribes and wars to gain control.

Since the Second World War, all the US presidents, beginning from Truman to Nixon to Reagan, followed military and security policies that also served to protect the interests of the oil companies. The 1973 oil crisis when the Arab states proclaimed an oil embargo after the Arab-Israel war, sent a shockwave across America and made the importance of securing sources of cheap Gulf oil all the more crucial. Washington even seriously considered sending a military strike force to seize oil fields in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE.

As if to carry out just such a task in such an eventuality, President Jimmy Carter formed the US Central Command in 1979, a permanent military force designed to intervene in the Middle East on short notice.

So when Saddam Hussein cut off this "uninterrupted flow of oil" as sought by the US policy by nationalising the country's oil industry in 1972, it was also a shock for America. The American and British oil companies lost their business which they controlled since oil was discovered in Iraq in the late 1920s.

The irony is a young Saddam Hussein was recruited by the US intelligence services in 1959 to stage a coup against the then Iraqi prime minister Abd al-Karim Qasim who, as a nationalist leader, had threatened to renegotiate oil production terms with the US oil companies.

What made matters worse is that Iraq in the 1990s started negotiating with French, Russian, Japanese and Chinese companies for production sharing as Iraq desperately needed investment and technology. But these deals eventually fell through because of UN sanctions.

The US and UK companies were more than happy with the sanction because that kept their competitors off the Iraqi oil. But as the sanction became weaker in the late 1990s, the oil majors got nervous and weighed in with the

Washington policy hawks' idea of invading Iraq.

As lie after lie were manufactured in Washington about Saddam's non-existent Weapons of Mass Destruction to build the case for invasion, Iraqi dissidents opposed to Saddam's regime were brought together by the US under the banner of Iraqi National Congress (INC). The idea was once Saddam was ousted, a client government fully controlled and backed by the US would comply with its demands for full control over Iraq's oil.

However, the biggest stumbling block in fulfilling that ambition was the nationalisation law of Iraq oil, so it needed to be reversed.

The INC leaders came handy for Washington policymakers now as they spoke out in agreement with Washington on the need to change the law.

Faisal Qaragholi, who was heading the INC's London office, told The Washington Post before the war: "We will review all these agreements, definitely. Our oil policies should be decided by a government in Iraq elected by the people."

Ahmed Chalabi, another INC leader who later became Iraq's interim minister for oil, said he would like to see a US-led consortium to develop Iraq's oil fields.

"American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil," Chalabi said. This meant the nationalisation policy would be changed once Saddam was removed.

THE NEOCONS IN THE SHADOW

The role of the neoconservative lobby in the Iraq War has been discussed widely in the US. The neoconservatives, or neocons, operate on a blend of liberalism and hawkish foreign policy. The neocons made them entrenched in the Bush administration. A central postulate of the Bush foreign policy has been the security of Israel. Both the domestic Israel lobby and Bush administration believed removing Saddam would lead to a "domino effect of liberalisation that would simultaneously fulfill the aims of increasing Israel's security and the wider aims of the Bush doctrine."

The force behind the Iraq War was fueled by neoconservative intentions. Review of neocon literature, speeches, and policy papers show "...neocons were its architects and chief proponents."

In his book, *The Road to Iraq: The Making of a Neoconservative War*, Muhammad Idrees Ahmad provides a thoroughly detailed description of how the neocons were obsessed for decades with toppling Saddam's regime and they used their magazines, think tanks and ad hoc committees to push their ideological agenda "using the levers of the state and the media in pursuit of that agenda".

Deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz argued for invasion of Iraq only four days after the 9/11 attack at New York.

Ahmad writes, the war was "conceived in Washington, but its inspiration came from Tel Aviv." It was not in the geostrategic interest of the US but it served the Israeli interest in removing a political enemy and it used all its might to pursue that policy.

Neocons like Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Richard Perle, Lewis Libby, John Bolton and others neocons maintained a very close network and worked to convince the Bush administration to attack Iraq.

Mearsheimer and Walt, two preminent realist scholars in international relations theory, maintain that both Israeli leaders and the Israeli lobby in the US urged the Bush administration to invade Iraq.

A neoconservative think tank, The Project for the New American Century (PNAC), was based in Washington, D.C. that focused on the US foreign policy. Observers have suggested that PNAC played a key role in shaping the foreign policy of the Bush administration, particularly in building support for the Iraq War. Of the 25 people who signed PNAC's founding statement of principles, 10 went on to serve in the administration of George W. Bush, including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz.

Kristol and Kagan of PNAC advocated regime change in Iraq throughout the Iraq disarmament crisis.

A HAND IN GLOVE

RELATIONSHIP

US and UK oil companies always maintained a close link with their governments and it happened so often that either the top policymakers owned oil firms or the oil company top brasses worked for the government.

For example, president George W. Bush and his father were both chief executives of their own oil companies. Vice president Dick Cheney was the CEO of Halliburton, the largest US oil-services company, and national security advisor Condoleezza Rice was a director of Chevron Texaco.

On the other hand, the British government itself held a majority stake until 1987 in British Petroleum (BP), one of the five oil majors of the world. Then prime minister Tony Blair, who lied to his people to join the US-led Iraq invasion, and BP CEO Lord Browne were so closely bonded that the press called the company "Blair Petroleum."

The Institute for Policy Studies has released a report based upon secret diplomatic cables just declassified by the National Archives and internal communications of the Bechtel Corporation, America's largest construction and civil engineering company, that showed the key players in the Iraq war such as Donald Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney, known as the hawks in Bush cabinet, and other former Reagan administration officials Roger Robinson, Judge William B. Clark and Robert McFarlane, were all closely involved in issues relating to Iraqi oil as far back as the 1980s.

The report titled "*Crude Vision: How Oil Interests Obscured US Government Focus on Chemical Weapons Use by Saddam Hussein*," shows how White House officials on a mission to discuss Saddam's chemical use in Iran in mid 1980s completely sidestepped the issue. Rather they discussed how Bechtel can secure a \$2-billion oil pipeline, running from the Euphrates oil fields in southern Iraq to Jordan.

Today, Bechtel is one of the two leading contractors for "reconstruction" of Iraq.

Murderers go unpunished

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In one instance, the allegations against an accused in a 2004 murder case filed with Kotwali Police Station, Chittagong, had been called into question in court because the magistrate didn't certify whether the confessional statement was voluntary and true. The defence drew the court's attention to the fact that the statement had not been signed in all designated places by the magistrate.

The accused in four cases were acquitted due such incompetence. A court said the magistrate responsible might have made the error "due to his busy schedule" but didn't ask the authority to take action against him.

In another case, an accused was caught red-handed with a gun by local people, but the investigation officer (IO) failed to mention whether the gun was loaded at the time.

The report said mistakes were also made in compiling lists of prosecution witnesses as well. The children and wife of a murder victim had been kept out of the list in a case. There were neutral witnesses who had been present at the place of occurrence when the murder took place but the IO in the charge sheet didn't mention any of them as witnesses.

There was also inconsistent description of the murder weapon in the post-mortem report and the First Information Report in a case. The IO failed to present evidence and witnesses.

Many cases lost their validity for faulty post-mortem reports. In one case, the forensic expert who conducted the autopsy didn't mention if it was a suicide or murder. Asphyxia was noted as the cause of death, which

could point towards either murder or suicide.

Apart from these reasons, courts had to discharge the accused in 45 cases because the witnesses had been tampered with, and so the allegations could not be proven using their "influenced" testimonies.

Witness tampering may happen when a trial takes too long, said Mostofa Kamal, special superintendent of the PBI. As time passes, the complainant and witnesses lose confidence in the judicial process, and they are willing to go for out-of-court settlements with the accused.

The PBI suggested quick trials so that perpetrators don't get away with committing crimes.

It observed that some cases took as many as 21 years to get to the end of the trial, and the accused took advantage of the lengthy procedure to influence the outcome.

Police and investigators should be trained on a regular basis and should face action for their mistakes, the PBI report said. Moreover, the failure of IOs to appear in court to testify and to bring witnesses to court should be addressed.

According to the report, the IO of a case had not appeared in court at all, and in four other cases the IOs failed to bring adequate number of witnesses to court.

But the irony is that there wasn't a single order from the respective courts asking for action against the officials responsible -- be it the IO, medical officer or magistrate.

"But it was [action against them] necessary," the PBI said in the report, adding that it was a significant step if the nation wants to come out of its culture of impunity.

Myanmar president

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Observers say this will likely make some inside Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party uneasy as, in theory, decisions could be pushed through -- or held back -- in this time.

Speculation had swirled for months about the health of Htin Kyaw, 72, who had recently lost weight and has had heart problems in the past.

"Myanmar President U Htin Kyaw resigned on March 21, 2018," a statement on the president's official Facebook page said.

His office did not give many details for why he resigned yesterday, only saying that "he wanted to take a rest from his current duty".

It added that a new leader will be selected "within seven working days".

Shortly after the announcement, Speaker of the Lower House and Suu Kyi ally Win Myint resigned from his position, narrowing his odds of taking up Myanmar's top civilian office.

"Anyone she selects as president will be someone she has complete trust in," said independent analyst Richard Horsey.

"That trust is the basis of her being the seat of power in Myanmar. She has no power under the constitution. Any power comes from that relationship with the president."

LOYAL SCHOOL FRIEND

Htin Kyaw, the country's first civilian president since 1962, was widely respected and seen as unerringly devoted to Suu Kyi, who said she would rule "above" him after he was elected in 2016.

He has stood firmly by her side even as her reputation has been shredded internationally for not speaking up on behalf of the persecuted Rohingya Muslim community.

A violent military crackdown has forced some 700,000 Rohingyas to flee

over the border into squalid camps in Bangladesh, in what the UN has branded "ethnic cleansing" with possible "hallmarks of genocide".

The military justifies its campaign as a legitimate response to Rohingya militant attacks against police posts in August.

The civilian government is in a transitional power-sharing arrangement with the army which still retains huge political and economic power.

The army controls three key ministries -- home affairs, borders and defence -- effectively giving it a carte blanche to conduct any security operations it chooses.

It also has a quarter of legislative seats reserved for officers, giving the military a de facto veto over any constitutional change.

Defenders of Suu Kyi say her government's hands are tied by the military but critics maintain it could and should have done more to speak up against alleged army atrocities, particularly in Rakhine State.

Domestically Suu Kyi still enjoys broad popular support but, two years into government, her party has disappointed sky-high expectations of rapid development and economic growth, while the Rakhine crisis has recast the international narrative of the country.

Htin Kyaw is the son of a revered poet and helped run Suu Kyi's charitable foundation before taking over the presidency.

According to an official biography, he studied at the University of London's Institute of Computer Science from 1971 to 1972.

In a varied career he worked as a university teacher and also held positions in the finance and national planning and foreign affairs ministries in the late 1970s and 80s before retiring from government service as the military tightened its grip.

Yahya postpones

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People's Party chief Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Yahya sat in a meeting at the president's house.

It was the sixth meeting between the president and Bangabandhu which lasted for about one hour and fifteen minutes.

At the beginning, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman asked the president if he had gone through the Awami League proposal regarding a proclamation and whether the regime agreed to it.

Yahya said before the enforcement of the proclamation, he needed assent of Pakistan People's Party.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman told the president to pursue Bhutto into accepting the proclamation idea quickly otherwise the situation would be deteriorated further.

After the meeting, Bangabandhu,

the chief of Awami League, described the ongoing movement as the struggle for total emancipation of seven crore Bangalis.

He told journalists that the movement would continue until the final goal was achieved.

On the same day, Bhutto told a news conference in Dhaka that his party was examining the draft proclamation of the Awami League and the government had been discussing over the past few days.

Bhutto said they were examining the broad agreement reached between the President and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and assured that his party would make every effort to reach an understanding to end the present crisis.

[Source: Liberation War Museum and The Daily Star Archive]

Ex-leader

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Gayoom's legislator son Faris Maumoon and son-in-law were also charged, along with another judge.

The 11 are accused of trying to topple Yameen who came to power following a controversial election run-off in November 2013 when he narrowly defeated former president Mohamed Nasheed.

Yameen declared the emergency on February 5, curtailing the powers of the judiciary and the legislature, after the country's Supreme Court ruled to quash criminal convictions against high profile opposition politicians.

The ruling would have allowed Nasheed -- who lives in exile in

London -- to return to the archipelago and challenge Yameen for the presidency.

Yameen refused to carry out the court order and instead arrested the chief justice and another Supreme Court judge.

The remaining judges revoked the earlier decision to release the MPs while Yameen also stripped parliament of its power to impeach him.

He has resisted international calls to end the state of emergency, release all political prisoners and restore the rule of law.

The crackdown has dented the nation's image as a popular tourist destination.