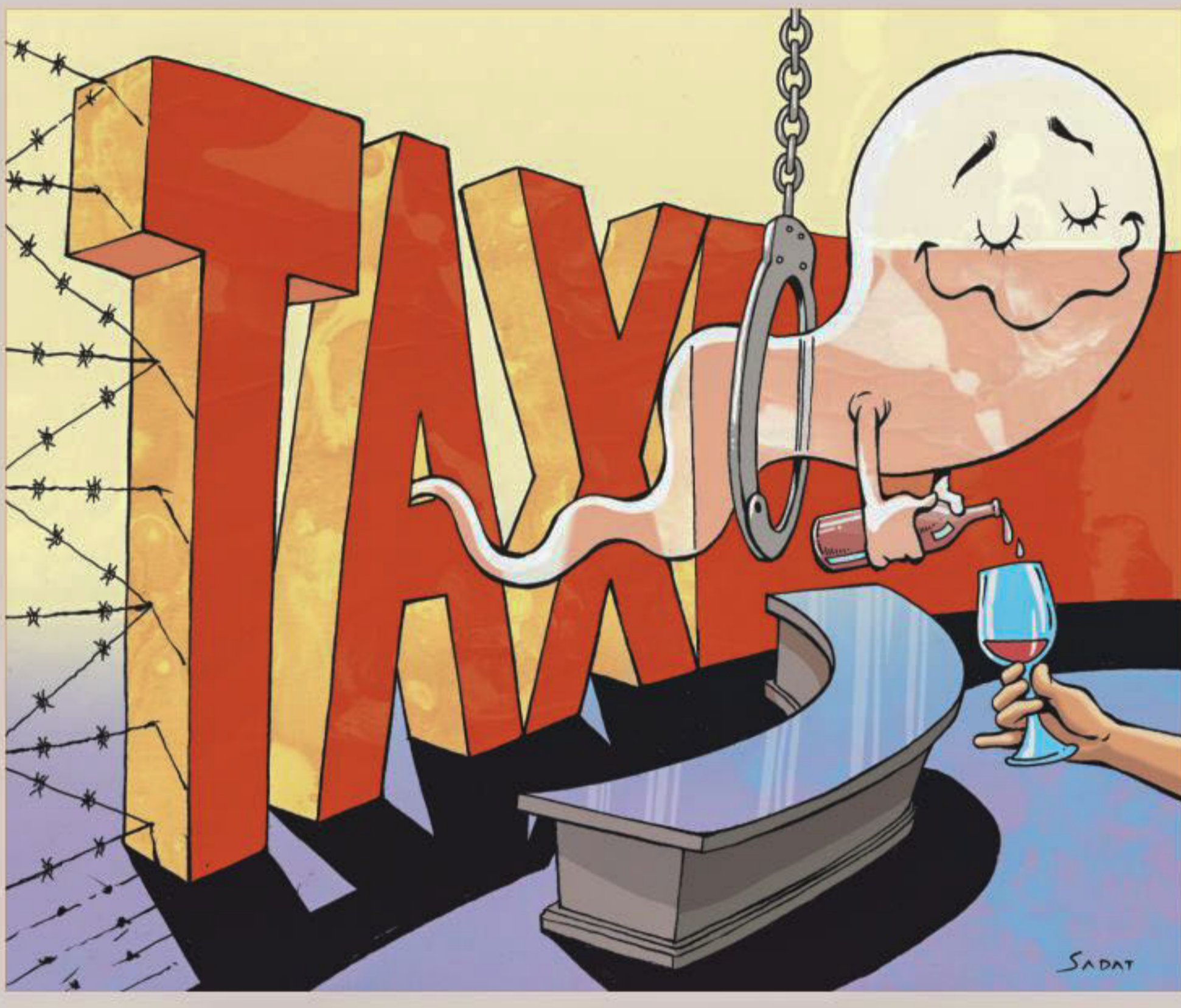




The world of liquor business is quite murky to say the least. The law restricts import, sale and consumption of liquor here in Bangladesh. But in reality, there is no short supply of alcohol in bars and clubs as the illegal liquor market booms. What is their source then? In a long investigation, The Daily Star's **Sohel Parvez**, **Martin Swapan Pandey**, **Zyma Islam**, **Mohammad Suman** and **Shamiul Hossain** unmask parts of the illegal trade. Today, we are running the first instalment of the two-part series.

# GIVEN BY GHOSTS

*Officially, most bars and social clubs neither import nor purchase alcohol yet they log huge sales; restrictive law, high import tariff, bureaucratic nightmare encouraging smuggling; govt loses big, earning almost nothing out of this trade*



This means, the club could buy foreign liquors only from the Parjatan Corporation, the official importer who can sell to others. But Parjatan's sales data for 2015-2017 show it did not.

In separate letters issued between April and September 2016, the narcotics department, which is under the home ministry, brought similar charges against the three other clubs. They did not import or buy any liquor from Parjatan for between three and nine years.

The department asked the four clubs to explain their operations and reveal the source of their liquor.

The Daily Star has been able to obtain the response of only one club.

"Our foreigner members bring their own liquor to drink on the club premises ... Also, we bought 64.5 litres of liquor from Carew and Co [the only state-owned liquor producer and exporter] around August/September of 2014 to serve our guests," it wrote in a letter dated April 17, 2016.

It is an astonishing claim. The club's own annual reports show it made over Tk 46 lakh from bar sales from October 2015 to June 2017.

Last night, a 750ml bottle of Carew's liquor

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Call it a puzzle?

The bar of the club bustles with members, merrily drinking away the night. Expensive whiskey and wine bottles glisten on the bar cabinets -- Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, Blue Label, you name it. At least three kinds of beer invitingly chill in the freezer.

Nothing wrong in it. Except, the club did not officially import or purchase any of them. They are all crops of a clandestine liquor business that is thriving in the country abusing the duty-free imports for diplomats and through smuggling, taking advantage of a restrictive and high tax policy.

The absurdly high tax on liquor, as much as 605 percent, does not achieve any of the aims of the government. Neither does it restrict sales nor does it earn the government any import duty as almost the entire business is run illegally.

An investigation by The Daily Star has unmasked parts of the illegal trade. But much remains behind the closets as people involved in the trade right from the bonded warehouses to customs officials to foreign ministry officials to the club owners refuse to divulge information.

However, what has been gathered since February this year is enough to prove the illegal liquor business run by an oligarchy comprised of some top businesses.

## PURCHASE NIL, SALE STK 6.5 CRORE

In 2016, the narcotics department demanded an answer to a puzzle from four top social

In 2016-17, only **28** of the **144** licensed bars and clubs bought foreign liquors from Parjatan, the only official importer and seller

Four top social clubs in the capital with no legal imports found serving liquor

Absurdly high tariffs encouraging black liquor markets

Alcohol trade thrives off smuggling and abusing duty-free imports for diplomats

clubs spread over the posh areas of the capital.

"Analysing relevant documents and records, we can see that you have neither imported nor purchased any alcohol since obtaining the licence. Even so the club routinely serves alcoholic drinks to its respected members. It is puzzling how the club is serving alcoholic drinks to its members," reads the letter dated September 24, 2016, to a prominent club.

The club in question obtained its bar licence in 1982 and did not have an import licence when the narcotics department issued the letter.

**"The bars and hotels that showed interest to buy liquor and beer imported by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation are not taking the supplies as expected.... As a result, a large volume of beer is now lying unsold and is at the risk of being expired."**

PARJATAN WROTE TO THE NARCOTICS DEPARTMENT ON JUNE 7 LAST YEAR.

- Diplomatic bonded warehouses partly feed the growing black market
- Customs officials connive with warehouses to allow illegal sales
- NBR itself complicit in allowing warehouses to import beyond diplomatic entitlement
- Irregularities found in state-run Parjatan too



Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan (L) cuts a forlorn figure as Mahmudullah Riyad (R) and Imrul Kayes stroke their way to a Bangladesh record sixth-wicket partnership of 128. The Tigers staved off a late Afghan onslaught to seal a three-run win.



PHOTO: AFP

# Tigers hold their nerve in thriller

SAKEB SUBHAN from Abu Dhabi

Mustafizur Rahman bowled a superb last over, conceding just four runs when eight were needed, as Bangladesh won the Asia Cup Super Four match against Afghanistan by three runs at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

With Pakistan losing the day's other match to India in Dubai, yesterday's result turns Bangladesh's last Super Four match against Pakistan on September 26 into a



virtual semifinal.

Defending 250 after the returning Imrul Kayes and Mahmudullah Riyad put on a Bangladesh-record sixth-wicket stand of 128 to help the Tigers post 249 for seven, Afghanistan brought the match to a thrilling

finish, needing 19 runs off the last 12 balls with five wickets in hand.

Mohammad Nabi hit Shakib Al Hasan for a six in the second ball of the penultimate over but holed out off a full toss in the

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# GREATER UNITY PROCESS AL watchful, BNP hopeful

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League is not bothered about Dr Kamal Hossain's efforts to forge a greater national unity demanding free and fair polls, but it is keeping a close eye on the process.

The BNP, on the other hand, is upbeat as the party thinks it is possible to bring all the opposition forces under a common platform and mount pressure on the government to hold a credible general election.

Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain and Bikalpadhara Bangladesh President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury at a citizens' rally on Saturday demanded formation of a polls-time neutral government through talks with political parties.

Several top leaders of the BNP and its allies shared the stage with the two along with representatives of some smaller parties and civil society.

Dr Kamal-led Jatiya Oikya Prokriya issued an ultimatum from the meeting for their three-point demand to be met by September 30, and announced a plan to hold rallies across the country from October 1.

The other two demands are effective steps for reconstituting the Election Commission and dissolution of parliament before the announcement of the election schedule.

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# BNP's dream will never come true

*It's too weak to wage movement, says Quader*

STAR REPORT

The BNP is too weak to wage a movement before the upcoming national elections, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

"They [the BNP] couldn't take to the streets even for 10 days in the last 10 years... when will they wage a movement? Will that happen in a month? People are now in election mood... they don't want any movement," Quader, also road, transport and bridges minister, said at a rally in Chattogram's Karnaphuli upazila.

The rally was organised as part of the ruling party's two-day roadshow from the capital to Cox's Bazar ahead of the national elections.

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# UNPAID WAGES Workers block highway for over 5 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Garment workers of a factory blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for around five hours at Chhoydana Degerchala in Gazipur yesterday morning demanding arrears.

They also vandalised several vehicles and clashed with police, resulting in long tailbacks on the busy highway.

The workers of Knit and Knitex Private Ltd also claimed that the factory provided them with unsafe drinking water that made 50 of them sick.

They had blocked the highway around 10:00pm on Saturday but police drove them away. Around 10:00am yesterday, they put up a barricade in Chhoydana Degerchala area.

Jamil Yusuf, who was heading for Jamalpur in a bus from Dhaka, said he got stuck in Board Bazar area around 11:30am and his bus did not move for a couple of hours.

Sohel Borhan said he headed for Dhaka from Mymensingh in a car around 11:00am. He returned home after being stuck in traffic for two hours.

PHOTO ON PAGE 2 SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

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