

Egypt court jails prominent activist for 5 years

AFP, Cairo

A leading figure in Egypt's 2011 revolution was handed 15 years in prison on Wednesday after a retrial, a judicial source told AFP.

Ahmed Douma was arrested in 2013 on charges of clashing with security forces in Cairo two years earlier, and received a 25-year prison sentence in 2015.

But the court of cassation overturned the ruling in October 2017 and ordered a retrial, which concluded on Wednesday.

In addition to the 15-year jail term, Douma was fined six million Egyptian pounds (\$335,000, 290,000 euros), a judicial source said. The verdict can be appealed.

Douma was a leading activist in the 2011 revolt that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak, who was succeeded by Islamist Mohamed Morsi.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a former army chief who led the military in ousting Morsi, is accused of leading a relentless crackdown on both pro-democracy campaigners and Islamists.

While numerous key activists from the revolution are behind bars, the majority of top figures from Mubarak's regime have gradually been acquitted and freed.

The 2011 revolt saw hundreds of thousands of protesters call for "bread, freedom and social justice" and rally against a regime seen as corrupt and dictatorial.

But eight years on, the majority of experts view Sisi's government as the most repressive in the history of modern Egypt.

In an interview with American network CBS aired this week, the president said Egypt has no political prisoners.

Revenue

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being bribed by shipping agents.

"Following the complaint, Director General Mohammad Munir Chowdhury called the ACC's Chattogram office and asked it to investigate.... the ACC officials raided the office and found Tk 6 lakh in a drawer," said Mahbubul.

ACC officials also found a list of nine shipping agents who might have given the money to the suspect.

After the incident, ACC officials took the suspect into their custody, he added.

Shipping Agents' Association president Ahsanul Haque Chowdhury said shipping agents are often forced to bribe customs officials to get clearance for importing goods.

More than 30

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three rounds of talks with the Taliban, although the insurgents called off a fourth round this week.

The latest Taliban attacks came in the northern provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar, and Badghis in the west.

Ahmad Fahim Qarluq, the chief of the Qala-e-Zal district in Kunduz, said a large number of Taliban attacked security checkpoints in the early hours, killing 10 soldiers and police and wounding 11.

Qarluq said 25 Taliban fighters were killed.

In neighbouring Baghlan and Takhar provinces, the Taliban killed 16 members of pro-government militias in attacks on outposts, officials said.

They also said the Taliban suffered heavy casualties.

To the west, in Badghis province, Jamshid Shahabi, spokesman for the governor, said six members of the security forces were killed and 10 wounded in clashes.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, claimed responsibility for the attacks, and said in statement that the militants had killed dozens of members of the security forces and captured a large number of weapon and ammunition.

Mother of four

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had tricked her into going to an empty house in Lalmai upazila on January 22 and raped her.

Jahirul Islam, who is a lawyer's clerk, asked her to go to a lawyer's house with him. He assured her that the lawyer would be able to win the case in no time.

But he took her to the empty house of the lawyer and raped her along with the guard of the house Liton Biswas and another lawyer's clerk Anisur Rahman, she said.

She said she had not filed the case earlier because she was scared of going to police.

"They had been threatening me over phone not to go to police," said the mother of four.

Bangladesh moves

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changing names in the passports, a globally appreciated initiative.

"These initiatives are making our passport stronger," he told The Daily Star.

Of the South Asian countries, Pakistan has been ranked 102nd (visa-free access to 33 countries), India 79th (61 countries), Sri Lanka 95th (43 countries) and Nepal 98th (40 countries).

Myanmar has been ranked 90th with access to 48 countries.

Japanese passport, which allows its holders to visit 190 countries without visa, is the most powerful in the world, followed by the ones of Singapore and South Korea (189 countries).

China jumped almost 20 places in just two years, from 85th in 2017 to 69th this year.

European countries also performed favourably, with France and Germany filling the third position and Denmark, Italy, Finland and Sweden taking the fourth spot with visa-free access to 187 countries.

The United States ranked sixth along with the United Kingdom with visa-free access to 185 countries while Canada ranked seventh.

The five least powerful passports are of Afghanistan and Iraq with access to 30 countries, Somalia and Syria to 32, Pakistan to 33, Yemen to 37 and Eritrea to 38.

Christian H Kälin, group chairman of Henley and Partners, in a statement said the latest ranking shows that despite rising isolationist sentiment in some parts of the world, many countries remain committed to collaboration.

Thai PM

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development cooperation.

"On behalf of the Royal Thai government and the Thai people, I wish to express my sincere congratulations to you [Hasina] on your re-election as prime minister of Bangladesh for a fourth term," said the message shared by the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

Meanwhile, President of Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Yong Nam and its Prime Minister Pak Pong-ju yesterday also congratulated Hasina.

Blessings of syndicate

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wishing anonymity.

Some DGHS directors are also members of the syndicate, said sources.

The graft watchdog on Wednesday asked two DGHS directors and an assistant director to appear before it on January 14 with their wealth statements.

They would be quizzed about the allegations of possessing wealth beyond their known sources of income, read ACC notices.

Yesterday, Abzal told the graft watchdog that he bought the house in Sydney for \$0.2 million.

However, ACC Deputy Director Shamsul Alam, who led the four-member interrogation team, said the amount would be much higher.

"He transferred money from Bangladesh to Australia through informal channels to buy the house," Shamsul told The Daily Star, adding that Abzal sent several hundred crore taka to Malaysia, Canada and the USA through informal channels.

Abzal went to Singapore at least five times for treatment and visited Australia with his family several times. His only son and two daughters studied in Australia for several years. They are now residing in Bangladesh, sources said.

The DGHS staff set up a contracting firm, Rahman Trade International, and made his wife Rubina its proprietor.

"The firm used to supply surgical equipment to government hospitals and institutions. Using this company, the couple looted public money," said an ACC official.

During enquiry into Abzal's wealth, the graft watchdog also found that the couple owns four five-storey buildings and a plot in the capital's Uttara.

The ACC also learnt that they have several other plots and houses at different places, including Dhaka and Faridpur.

Abzal told the interrogators that he has an SUV.

The ACC has recently sent a letter to the superintendent of police of Special Branch to take steps so that the couple cannot flee the country.

In 2012, the graft watchdog had summoned Abzal for quizzing about his wealth, but he didn't appear before it.

ACC Deputy Director Shamsul said he had no idea about Abzal's no-show as he was not tasked with that enquiry at that time.

Sources said Abzal somehow managed to keep the enquiry halted.

This newspaper could not confirm

"The general spread of open-door policies has the potential to contribute billions to the global economy, as well as create significant employment opportunities around the world," he said.

Experts anticipate that neither the US nor EU member states are in line to substantially revise their current visa policies, whereas countries in other parts of Europe as well as those in Asia and the Middle East, look set to continue seeking visa-waiver agreements with diplomatic allies.

4 women

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Station against Kawsar and some unknown people under the women and children repression prevention act.

Police also lodged a case with the police station under the narcotics control act.

Police arrested three suspects -- Md Omayer, Ariful Islam alias Arman and Md Chhoton -- in this connection.

Omayer, who along with Arman was held on Wednesday, was produced before a Feni court with 10 days' remand appeal.

The court granted three days' remand for Omayer, said OC Azad.

Chhoton was arrested yesterday.

Quoting the victims and the case statement, police said after the four women were brought to the Rampur house, Kawsar and his accomplices confined and raped them.

If the women refused to do so, they were tortured and often threatened with death.

Police said Kawsar sometimes brought unknown people to the house and they also raped the four. The victims believe that Kawsar took money from the people.

Abu Taher, resident medical officer at Feni Sadar Hospital, said police took the four to the hospital for medical tests. The tests had been done and those were sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for results, he said.

"We have got the names of 12 to 13 perpetrators. Drives are on to arrest them," said OC Azad.

Shahidul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Sadar Model Police Station, said the victims gave their statements at Feni Judicial Magistrate's Court under section 22.

Our Feni correspondent contributed to this report.

which official had launched the enquiry in 2012 and why it was halted. Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Abzal over the phone for comments as it was found switched off.

Mona Lisa

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your right -- at your right ear, perhaps, or over your shoulder.

Gernot Horstmann, an associate professor at Bielefeld University's Center of Excellence - Cognitive Interaction Technology (CITEC), and Sebastian Loth, a research assistant, asked 24 participants to assess the gaze of the Mona Lisa.

Instead of simply asking each participant whether they felt the Mona Lisa was looking at them -- a binary response likely to be influenced by existing beliefs -- they displayed the painting on a computer screen, and asked the participants to measure the direction of the gaze on a two-metre (6.6-foot) carpenter's rule placed horizontally between them and the screen.

The distance between the participants and the computer screen remained the same, at 66 cm (26 inches), but the ruler was moved both closer to and further away from the screen throughout the trial.

The researchers also altered the size and visible area of the Mona Lisa to determine whether the perception of her stare was influenced by particular elements of her face. The participants were asked to respond to the painting at various degrees of zoom, between 30% and 70%, and saw crops that only included her eyes and nose, as well as others that showed her whole head.

To avoid the participants settling on the same measurement on the ruler every time, Horstmann and Loth also showed them the Mona Lisa moved 3.4 cm (1.3 inches) to the left and right.

Previous research cited in the study indicates the range of the Mona Lisa effect: the subject of an image will appear to be looking at its viewer if its gaze is within 5 degrees to the left or right.

The gaze of the "Mona Lisa," however, was measured by the study participants at an average angle of 15.4 degrees to the right -- in short, the Mona Lisa is definitely not looking at her audience.

"There is no doubt about the existence of the Mona Lisa effect," Horstmann and Loth concluded. "It just does not occur with Mona Lisa herself."

Dr Kamal

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He came up with these remarks while addressing a discussion organised by the Gonoforum at the Dhaka Reporters Unity, marking the historic Homecoming Day of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Dr Kamal, who presided over the discussion, urged all the political parties to sit for a dialogue in a bid to discuss the formation of an elected government by holding a fresh election as per the constitution.

Dr Kamal, who is also the president of the Gonoforum, said, "A sane person cannot play such a game with the country's 17 crore people. This can't be done unless a person is mentally imbalanced."

He also questioned if there was anyone who could call the election a free and fair one.

"It's regrettable what happened in the name of election even after 48 years [of the country's independence]. It was not supposed to happen."

The eminent jurist said the election was held on the night of December 29 instead of December 30.

"Why did they do that? I would like ask them what is the necessity of doing such an unusual act? Is it a game? Is it fair to play a game with the country's 17 crore people?"

Dr Kamal also said the December 30 election was a good example of political tricks. "I would like to request you, please refrain from resorting to political tricks and do everything through talks and as per the constitution. There can be no alternative to that."

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President ASM Abdur Rob, Gonoforum Executive President Subrata Chowdhury, Gonoforum General Secretary Mostafa Mohsin Montu, Gonoforum MP-elect Mukabbir Khan, Gonoforum leader Maj Gen (ret'd) Amsa Amin, also spoke among others in the discussion.

Seen in north

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hanging by its tail. It was then that I realised the bird was a species of the Drongo among the brighter coloured minivets.

According to local bird expert and associate professor of the zoology department in Govt MM Ali College in Tangail, SM Iqbal the bird was a lesser racket-tailed Drongo.

Iqbal said, "It is scientifically known as Dicrurus Remifer and in Bangla it's called Chhoto Bhimraj," adding that this was the first time the bird was spotted in the northern districts in the last 100 years.

"Bird enthusiasts and wild life photographers are still looking for this bird throughout the northern districts," he said.

These birds are known to be winter migratory birds in Bangladesh and are generally found in all kinds of forests in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna and Sylhet divisions. "During their breeding period, April to June, they can be found in the Himalayas and Northeast India," Iqbal said.

"High populations of the lesser racket-tailed Drongo are found in India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar. They come to Bangladesh during winter and wander in forests and feed on flying insects. They also protect various small birds from their predators," said Iqbal.

Eminent wildlife expert Monirul H Khan of Jahangirnagar University said, "It's rare to see the lesser racket-tailed Drongo in Bogura out of green forests or Shalban. However, the greater racket-tailed Drongo is a residential bird here and can be spotted frequently."

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed the bird under the "Least Concern Species" category as it is not threatened globally, but this bird is protected under the Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Act in Bangladesh.

2 'yaba traders'

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drug traders opened fire on police and a "gunfight" ensued when the law enforcers fired back in retaliation, Pradip added.

Later, police recovered the two bullet-hit bodies from the spot, along with five firearms and 22,000 yaba pills, he said.

The bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar District Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Kalam was accused in 10 cases, including for drug dealing and human trafficking, while Rashid had 6 cases filed against him under the Narcotics Control Act. All the cases were filed with Teknaf Police Station, the OC added.

According to police sources, Sub-Inspector Borhan Uddin, Assistant Sub-inspector Farhad and Constable Hridoy of the police station sustained injuries in the "gunfight" and were receiving treatment at Teknaf upazila health complex.

Police filed a case in this connection.

With the two, a total of 277 suspected drug traders have so far been killed since the country-wide anti-narcotics drive began on May 4, last year. Most of them were killed in so-called shootouts, involving members of police and Rapid Action Battalion.

However, the number of death is even higher according to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). The legal aid organisation, at a press briefing yesterday, said 292 people were killed across the country from May 4 to December 31, last year in the drives conducted by the law enforcers.

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1
Farmers Bank could not recover any of the loans it had disbursed and ticked them as classified and that it has failed to recover a single penny of its Tk 4,198 crore un-classified loans in April-June quarter. Also citing central bank figures, it claimed the bank could only make a meager recover of Tk 2 crore only.

"Our humble submission is that nothing is further from the truth. In fact, the bank has recovered a total of Tk 510 crore between January and December 20 this year. And during this period, it paid Tk 1,609 crore to its depositors and other claimants. In fact, the bank has paid Tk 1,000 crore of its own generated fund of its clients. And that money has come from our recovery and deposits.

"The Farmers Bank, you may already know, is in a reconstruction process. And as part of this reconstruction process the bank's new management is trying to know the actual health of the bank. Our recovery and payments would obviously highlight that we are on the correct trail. I don't know what the newspaper has achieved by giving some incorrect figures on the bank's actual information.

"It is true the bank has classified loans. But the classification does not mean that the money has already been lost. In fact, the money has been under the process of recovery.

"The report does not contain any authenticated figures of the bank such

as deposits, payments, recovery and collection. We also humbly state that the reporter did not contact our managing director even though she claims so."

"As a result, the report that was published in your esteemed daily gave a very distorted and narrow picture of the bank. Between January and December 20, this year [2018] it's gross cash-flow stood at Tk 1,985 crore, reflecting its sound health in terms of its cash-flow, deposit movements and payments."

"The reporter also claimed that bank has suspended lending operation as per the central bank instructions. Again, it was an utterly incorrect statement. There is no Bangladesh Bank instruction in this regard. Lending operation is part of the bank's own strategy and has nothing to do with the central bank," said the statement.

OUR REPLY

The rejoinder did not contradict the points of recovery because our report covers the recovery of April-June quarter based on Bangladesh Bank's quarterly statement and the figures of December was not available with Bangladesh Bank that time.

The other figures related to deposits were collected from the Bangladesh Bank's statement. We spoke with the managing director of the bank on October 9 at 4:57pm and discussed the bank's health for 9.28 minutes. We stand by our report.

First conviction

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The money was sent to accounts at an RCBC branch, then headed by Deguito, before it disappeared into the casino industry in the Philippines.

"Her declaration in open court that she has nothing to do with these transactions was a complete and comprehensive lie," the court said in its 26-page ruling.

Deguito was "utterly shocked" and will appeal against the decision, said her lawyer, Demetrio Custodio, according to ABS-CBN news of the Philippines.

"We were pointing out to the court that Maia could not have acted on this because her position at the bank was one of customer care and therefore she had no function that will relate to the operation of banking transactions," Custodio said.

"I am disheartened to believe that due to the amount involved here, only a very lowly person is prosecuted by the government," he said.

"There should be more people who should be liable to this other than a very lowly bank officer who had nothing to do with operational matters."

RCBC was fined a record 1 billion pesos (\$19.17 million) by the Philippines central bank in August 2016 for its failure to prevent the movement of the stolen money through the bank.

A former treasurer of RCBC and five other workers at the branch where the cash was withdrawn face money laundering charges.

"We hope that this case could be expedited and could go to trial soon for a decision," Asad Alam Siam, Bangladesh's ambassador to the Philippines, told Reuters, regarding the charges.

Just \$15 million of the stolen money has been recovered from a Manila junket operator, a role that involves marketing casinos to VIPs.

GOV'T TEAM IN US

Meanwhile, Md Serajul Islam, a BB spokesperson, said a high-powered committee comprising BB and government officials is now in the US to decide how to proceed with filing a case against individuals or groups involved in the heist to recover the funds.

The team, which includes Md Ashadul Islam, secretary of the banking division, and Abu Hena Mohd Razez Hassan, chief of the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, will hold a final discussion with a New York law firm and the NY Fed. Coming back, the team members will report to the government and then go back to the US again to sue those responsible.

According to US laws, money-laundering cases have to be filed within three years of the crime being committed. This meant the case against the Fed would have to be filed with a New York court by this January.

AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a finance adviser to a former caretaker government, told The Daily Star, "It's a positive thing that the Philippines court has completed all the procedures of the case which proved the involvement of the RCBC official. But Bangladesh is still far away from [taking] any concrete stance on recovering the stolen funds."

He urged the Bangladesh government to publish the probe report submitted by a committee led by Mohammed Farashuddin, a former central bank governor.

Officials of the BB and the finance ministry pointed out that in the pre-trial process a few major suspects were

dropped from the case.

The Department of Justice (DoJ) cleared casino boss Kim Wong, junket operator Weikang Xu and remittance service Philem, according to the article of ABS-CBN.

Officials of the BB and the finance ministry said Wong knew that the money would come, and opened five false accounts with the help of Deguito eight months before the money came.

Philem actually withdrew the money from the intermediate account of William Go, a local trader, where Deguito transferred the money, once it arrived.

The company distributed the money to Kim, who took it to casino accounts, converted to chips, and thus the money whitened at gambling table and disappeared as white money in the market.

RCBC was also left out although the bank was requested both by the Fed of the US and the BB not to disburse the money saying that it was a heist.

There is one more case being pre-judged by the DoJ, against six RCBC top officials which, if goes on trial, might focus on how top management of the bank were involved.

When asked about the verdict, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told reporters yesterday that he hadn't received the copy of the verdict. "I will comment on it after I know the details."

He also said he was not updated on the hacking and the probe report.

Bangladesh

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next day, claiming their visas were fake.

Another Rohingya refugee in Australia, Aman Ullah, told SBS that he paid \$350 for a visa but received a fake one.

"I heard the visa scam news and went to the Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra. Shamima Pervin [second secretary at the High Commission] told me that mine was a forged one. In order to get a new visa, she said I need to report this to police, which I did," says Aman.

Asked, an immigration official in Dhaka said they detected a number of Rohingyas with fake visas but was unable to share the exact number.

"We checked with Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra and confirmed the visas were fake. Then we sent them [the Rohingyas] back," he added, seeking anonymity.

The six complaints were filed with Woden Police Station in Canberra in December 2018.

In a written statement to SBS, Bangladesh High Commissioner to Canberra Mohammad Sufiur Rahman said they had received allegations of visa forgery.

"While we have allegations, we cannot conclusively establish involvement of any of our staff [members], though we have received names of some agents or handlers perhaps from Sydney and Melbourne.

"We are yet to receive a detailed report from the relevant Bangladesh authorities on such document holders' travels to Bangladesh and our authorities' findings that led to the deportation of some of those Rohingyas."

He also said that Shamima Pervin had alerted them about the issuing of fake visas in April and November last year.