

Finish probe

FROM PAGE 12 several others for their involvement in the BASIC Bank loan scam.

The court may decide whether to grant Iqbal bail in the cases if the ACC failed to submit the charge sheets in two and half months, the HC said in the verdict.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim gave the orders while disposing of 20 bail petitions filed by Iqbal.

The countdown to the two-and-a-half month period will begin the day the ACC receives a copy of the verdict, Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told The Daily Star.

The ACC filed the 21 corruption cases in 2015 accusing the businessmen and bankers of embezzling around Tk 700 crore by inflating the prices of mortgaged properties of borrowers at the bank.

Iqbal, who was sent to jail on July 12, 2019, secured bail in one of the 21 cases from the HC earlier.

The HC yesterday asked the state and the ACC to explain why Iqbal should not be granted bail in the remaining 20 cases, DAG Manik said.

Hearing the petitions on Wednesday, the HC bench said the accused caused financial damage to the state and the inflating of the prices of properties must stop.

Merits of the cases will go to waste and the corruption accused will get bail if it took so long to submit the charge sheets, the bench observed.

On Wednesday, the HC heavily rebuked the ACC for its failure to submit the charge sheets in more than five years.

"If the corruption watchdog fails to discharge its responsibility, how the corruption and irregularities will be eradicated?" it said.

Lawyer Momtaz Parvin represented Iqbal, while Khurshid Alam Khan and AKM Fazlul Hoque the ACC during the hearing on the rules.

According to a Bangladesh Bank enquiry, between 2009 and 2013, about Tk 4,500 crore was swindled out of BASIC Bank.

Khaleda may take

FROM PAGE 2 The Daily Star yesterday.

He said people are now receiving vaccine shots at hospitals and vaccination centres, but the question remains how she will be vaccinated.

Khaleda was freed from jail for six months on March 25 last year, just a day before the government announced a general holiday to contain Covid-19 transmission in the country.

Family members and physicians said the treatment of the former prime minister was greatly hampered due to the pandemic.

The government had stayed Khaleda's conviction for six months and freed her on humanitarian grounds considering her age.

Since the beginning of the nationwide vaccination campaign on February 7, BNP leaders were critical of the government's vaccine management. They alleged that the government's shortsightedness created uncertainty over collecting a vaccine.

The party also demanded the government clarify its position on vaccine collection, pricing, storage and distribution as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, family members of Khaleda have urged the government to extend her stay out of jail to ensure her proper treatment that faced setbacks due to the pandemic.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan on Wednesday said the decision on relaxing "bail conditions" and waiving Khaleda's sentences would be taken after discussions with the law ministry.

Khaleda's younger brother Shamim Iskandar submitted the petition to the ministry on Tuesday, according to home ministry.

In the application, the family mentioned that they could not arrange treatment for the BNP chief during the pandemic and asked for relaxing the "bail conditions" and waiving sentences, said the home minister.

Khaleda received treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital when she was in jail.

She is suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and ophthalmological and dental ailments.

The BNP chairperson landed in jail on February 8, 2017 after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a special court in Dhaka in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

On October 30 the following year, the High Court enhanced her punishment to 10 years after dismissing her appeal in the case.

The former premier was convicted by another special court in Dhaka in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case on October 29, 2018. She was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment by the court.

Scars of torture

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"I was picked up on May 2. It was an hour before iftar. I was taking a nap when I was woken up by loud knocking. When I opened the door, around 17 men in plain clothes barged in. Four of them had small arms on them," said Kishore.

Point to be noted here -- the first information report filed by Rab-3 claims that Kishore was picked up from his Kakrail home around 2:30am on May 5, which is a direct contradiction of Kishore's statement.

The FIR states that Kishore was arrested by Rab-3 in the early hours of May 5, and produced in court on May 6, which is in line with detention laws that only allow for 24 hours of detention before it is mandatory to produce an arrestee in front of a magistrate. However, Kishore's claim alleges a period of arbitrary detention of at least 60 hours before his "official" time of arrest.

When asked about this time discrepancy, Rapid Action Battalion's media and legal wing director Lt Col Ashiq Billah said there was no violation. "He was produced in court during the time period specified by law. An aggrieved person can say anything he wants to."

Furthermore, Kishore alleged that it could not be ascertained whether the people who picked him up belonged to any law enforcement agency because they were in plain clothes.

"When I asked them for their identities, they just scolded me for making them wait. One person said his name is Jashim," said Kishore. "They ordered me to change out of my lungi and wear pants, and put on a clean shirt. When I asked why I would do that, Jashim replied, 'Just do what I tell you to do.'"

Kishore's lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua stated that law enforcement had no legal right to enter Kishore's house without a warrant or without showing their identification. "If they wanted to arrest him under section 54, certain strict conditions have to be met pertaining to his detention, which were not followed."

"We were in the room which had all my art supplies and computer hardware. Jashim was smoking a cigarette and he put it out on the floor. I asked him not to do that, and bent down to pick up the stub from the floor, when I saw a man take out a bag of red pills and a gun and try to plant it on my stack of books," described Kishore.

"That is when I started yelling. I held the hand of the person. He shook me off. I told him that you cannot do this to me and I asked them if they had a warrant," said Kishore. "Seeing that I was yelling, Jashim signalled the men to back off. He asked me to get out too, but I refused because I was afraid they would plant more things."

That is when they hauled him out. He saw that his entire house was turned upside down. "When I asked the reason, they just said, 'I will tell you the reason when we get into the car,'" narrated Kishore.

"When I came outside, I saw that they brought two strangers and made them sign a made-up seizure list. That is when they put a monkey cap over my head that completely covered my face up to my neck," said Kishore. "I was cuffed before being taken into the car, on the staircase."

Right before his head was shrouded in the monkey cap, Kishore noticed a line of six vehicles in front of his home. "The car right in front of me was a grey V6. There were two of these. There was a car with a licence plate that said 'Dhaka-Metro Sho-1812' or something like that. There was a Nissan Patrol. All the vehicles had tinted windows," described Kishore.

"My face was covered before I was put into a car so I don't know which vehicle I was in, but it was probably the grey V6," he said.

He did not know who was taking him, and where he was being taken, and every time he asked, they kept saying that they will let him know everything if he cooperates. "If you help us, I will help you," was what they told him, Kishore said.

"Once inside the car they turned on music and yanked the volume to the maximum. They were playing some very loud Hindi music followed by SD Rubel's music. It seemed like they were playing music so that if I scream, nobody can hear me," said Kishore.

He said the journey took around 40 minutes.

"I counted the minutes meticulously. They did not beat me inside the car, but when I kept asking why I was arrested, they just said 'Don't talk so much,'" he added.

In between, the car stopped at a place and the men stood on the road and ate iftar. "I realised I could lift up the cap using the two index fingers of my handcuffed hands, and when the car stopped, I lifted only enough to be able to see through the rim," said Kishore.

He said the place where they stopped had a mechanical roadblock. As the men ate, Kishore took a few minutes to gauge his captors.

"There was a house and a person got out of the house and went into a car -- I did not see his face but I saw his shoes. He was wearing moccasins. There was a person sitting in the seat in front of me. In his hand he had a cell phone and I caught a glimpse of the screen -- there was a map of some sort and a black text box with numbers. He kept moving the numbers around his screen with his fingers," said Kishore.

After iftar, the car resumed its journey again. "When the car stopped, I was told to get out. I tripped and stumbled and fell down, and it was then that they shoved and dragged me. I was dragged into a room, still blindfolded," narrated Kishore.

He felt his way around the room and found three plastic chairs. "The floor was tiled, but it felt old, scuffed, damp and slimy. There was an air-conditioned room nearby, because as I was brought into this room, I felt a blast of cold air coming from somewhere. A person came in -- he took my hands, which were cuffed in front of me, and cuffed them behind my back," said Kishore.

He kept begging for food, saying that he is diabetic and cannot go long periods without eating, but nobody responded.

"After a long while, they took me into another room -- it was a long walk from the room where I was being kept. They sat me down on a hard chair. There were things attached on the handles and the legs of the chair. They opened my blindfold and said in English, 'If you look

back, you will be killed'," Kishore narrated, adding that he could sense about 10-12 people.

"They pulled down a projector screen and put up a cartoon. It was a cartoon I had drawn depicting mother nature stitching the clothes of different countries. They asked me: 'Who did you draw? Did you draw the prime minister?'"

"I said I did not and that this was a conceptual cartoon about nature healing the world during the pandemic," said Kishore.

Kishore said they showed him one cartoon after another and asked about the characters he drew -- they asked regarding all of the female characters if they were the PM, and regarding all the male characters if they were the Father of the Nation.

"I got mad and asked, Bangabandhu has a mark on his face, does this cartoon have one? They then hit me on the leg with a thick stick with a steel knob on the tip. There were four sticks displayed in the front to hit me with," he said.

Kishore lashed back and said they don't understand cartoons.

"A person got up, and slammed both sides of my head with his palms."

Kishore felt a searing pain shoot through his left ear -- that is when his ear drum burst, he said.

The interrogation went on for a while, and each time Kishore fought back and refused to give in to their line of questioning, he was hit. "They hit me at the back of the head because my cap was up."

He was hit on the back, on his legs, behind his head. "They asked me for the passwords of my email and social media accounts. But by then I was not hearing anything in my right ear, which was bleeding. So, they had to write out the instructions for me, and I responded in writing," he said.

They continued interrogating him about the "I Am Bangladeshi" Facebook page, which used to share his posts, and asked him about how he knew Swedish-Bangladeshi journalist Tasneem Khalil, Hungary-based businessman Saer Zulkarnain, and Germany-based blogger Asif Mohiuddin. They also repeatedly interrogated him about a prominent businessman who had featured in one of his cartoons.

In addition, Kishore said that he was interrogated about radical extremists and about whether he was involved in the blogger killings.

"I said that my friends were the ones being attacked and killed," he said.

"I was in the room for between four and five hours. I heard the azaan once, and there was a strong smell of petrol which made me sneeze. There was also a lot of noise from cars," he said.

At one point, Kishore told them that he needed to go to the bathroom, or that he would soil his clothes. "The bathroom was not smelly or dirty but there was a lot of blood on the floor. I was still blindfolded, but I saw from beneath the edge of my blindfold," said Kishore.

He requested that the blindfold be removed while he uses the toilet, but his captor prodded his back with a stick and ordered him to walk up front and urinate.

After a while, he was sent back to the first room. "I was in a lot of pain and blood was pouring out my nose and ears, but I was determined to not stay in there. I even stood up and opened the door, but two people came up and said they would kill me if I move. They told me they had not done anything to me yet."

In the early hours of the morning, a person with a crew cut came into his room and gave him stale pulao and meat to eat.

A few hours later he was taken back into the interrogation room, and round after round of questioning and torture continued.

"I lost sense of time and days. I was only fed twice -- the first one was the spoilt pulao and the second was a packet of something, but there was so much pain in my mouth that I could not eat," said Kishore.

At one point, during evening time, Kishore said his captors took him to Rab-3's office in Khilgaon.

"The minute they took my blindfolds off, cameras started flashing. That's when I saw Mushtaq [Ahmed, the writer who died in custody on February 25]. He said, 'Be proud man! You have not done any crime!'"

"Mushtaq was smelling strongly of urine. He too had been picked up a few days ago, and had been beaten a lot. He was electrocuted in the genitals. There were newspapers on the floor and I asked Mushtaq to use that to clean himself. He took off his underwear and threw it away -- I saw that it had excrement in it. He had defecated in his pants from the torture, he told me," said Kishore.

An assistant superintendent came to question them. "I asked to go to a bathroom, but requested a clean bathroom... and the officer took me to their personal bathroom. The officer told someone to clean the blood from the ear. I was also given biscuits and tea once," said Kishore.

The duo was taken to Ramna Police Station at dawn. "The duty officer asked me if I was tortured, and I wanted to say yes, but Mushtaq stopped me, saying that we could not tell the truth, or we would be tortured more," said Kishore.

Hours later, they were taken to the court and thus began their 10-month ordeal in prison.

"Mushtaq and I were in different prisons, different cells. I only saw him on February 23. I got to know about Mushtaq's death from another inmate who got the newspaper. He saw the news of Mushtaq's death," said Kishore.

And it was at that point when the man, who had up until then been describing the horrifying torture that was inflicted upon him with an impassive, defiant face, broke down in tears at the mere mention of Mushtaq.

"I am having to hear that it is because he died that I am free. I did not want freedom like this. Mushtaq told me 'let's get out, get fit and go see Mt Everest'. We were supposed to get out together," he wept.

On March 4, Kishore's lawyer Barua appealed to the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim to accept a complaint against the Rab members under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013.



Members of East Pakistan Students' Union brought out a procession on March 5, 1971 to protest the police firing in Tongi which left 4 workers dead and 25 injured.

An end foretold

FROM PAGE 12

president would be visiting Dhaka soon but the date is yet to be confirmed. The same night, around 9:10pm, Yahya rang Yaqub and said, "I have changed my mind. I am not coming to Dhaka."

He hung up saying, "I cannot come because I am convinced that it won't bring me anywhere near the solution."

Immediately, General Yaqub made a telephone call to Peerzada and told him, "Peer, if the President cannot be persuaded to come [to Dhaka], I may be relieved of my responsibilities. I will send you my formal resignation tomorrow morning." [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg.50]

Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, nicknamed "the Butcher of Baluchistan", was appointed in Yaqub's place. The official announcement of Tikka Khan's appointment as the governor of East Pakistan came on March 6, 1971.

Both Admiral Ahsan and General Yaqub was removed by Yahya for having protested a hard line against the Bangladeshis. They advised Yahya to settle things politically, not militarily.

BANGABANDHU FORESAW THE END OF PAKISTAN

Air Marshal (Ret.) Asghar Khan, leader of National Movement for Solidarity party, called on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his Dhanmondi residence on March 5, 1971. We get a glimpse of their discussion in Asghar Khan's book *Generals in Politics*: he [Mujib] was certain that Yahya Khan had already made up his mind not to hand over power and that he would use the army to crush the

East Pakistanis. He said that he was a Pakistani and had played a part in the Pakistan movement, having travelled from Calcutta to Delhi with a Pakistan flag shouting "Ban kar rahega Pakistan".

"Where were Yahya Khan and Bhutto then?" he had asked in an emotion choked voice. ... I asked Mujib-ur Rahman [Mujibur Rahman] what scenario he visualised and how the stalemate could be broken. He replied that the situation was very clear. Yahya Khan would come to Dacca [Dhaka] first, followed by MM Ahmed [Head of the planning commission], who would be followed by Bhutto. Yahya Khan would then order military action and that would be the end of Pakistan. [Mohammad Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics: Pakistan 1958-1982*, UPL, 1983, pp.29-30]

ARMY WITHDRAWN TO BARRACKS The martial law authorities withdrew the army to the barracks on March 5. According to a government announcement, the action followed Bangabandhu's appeal for peace, after which there had been considerable improvement in the general law and order situation.

Meanwhile, a completehartal was observed in the capital as well as other parts of the province.

Security forces opened fire on the demonstrating workers of Telephone Industries at Tongi, which left four workers dead and 25 others injured.

A 10-hour curfew was imposed in Rangpur town from the evening.

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Jail super, 4 others sued

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"Taking the case into cognisance, the court ordered the Police Bureau of Investigation to probe into the case and submit a report," added Bhulon Lal.

The case statement said Ratam and Rupam were business partners and, following a feud, Ratan filed a case with the court against Rupam, after which the latter was sent to the jail on December 15 last year.

"A few days ago, the jail authority phoned the victim's wife saying that Rupam was in bad condition and was being treated in hospital. They also said they will bear the cost of Rupam's treatment and asked them [Rupam's family] not to worry," said Bhulon Lal.

"Following the information, the victim's wife submitted a plea before the court to shift her husband to hospital from jail on February 28. The court granted the plea. Later, she was able to meet her husband at CMCH, where she found injury

marks all over his body and learned of the torture he had to endure," said the lawyer.

Citing the case statement, he said, "The accused injected drugs into the victim's arms for mental distortion and gave him electric shocks to force a confession out of him."

"The incident took place between 24th and 25th February at Sangu-1 of the jail territory," he added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Md Shafiqul Islam, the accused jail super, said, "The allegation is baseless. We are the custodians of the prisoners and there is no room for torturing a prisoner for confessions inside the jail," adding that Rupam was admitted to CMCH on February 25 because of diabetes.

He also said the Rupam was suffering from some kind of infection in his groin, which was later operated on by doctors while he was in hospital.

"A five-member probe committee was formed by the jail authority to investigate the incident," added the jail super.

Halt vicious crackdown

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who have joined the civil disobedience movement to support efforts to hold military leaders accountable for serious human rights violations, through UN investigations and proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday he was horrified by the escalation of violence in Myanmar.

"We stand with the people of Myanmar in calling for an immediate end to military repression, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and others, and the restoration of democracy," Johnson said on Twitter.

Activists said they refused to accept

military rule and were determined to press for the release of the detained Suu Kyi and recognition of her victory in a November election.

Defiant anti-coup protesters returned to the streets across Myanmar yesterday after the deadliest day of the junta's crackdown.

Police opened fire and used tear gas to break up protests in Yangon and the central town of Monywa, witnesses said. Police also fired in the town of Pathain, west of Yangon, and used tear gas in Taunggyi in the east, media reported.

In Yangon, hundreds of protesters soon assembled again to chant slogans and sing.

Modi to visit Tungipara, Barishal

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The sources, wishing not to be named, said that PM Modi has also desired to visit Rabintra Kuthi Bari in Kushtia and the ancestral home of Bagha Jatin, a revolutionary leader against the British rule, in Kushtia.

An official of Bangladesh mission here said, "It was almost certain that the Indian PM is visiting Orkandi temple but his visit to 'Satipithi' and other areas are not confirmed yet."

He said separate groups of Indian High Commission officers in Dhaka and Bangladesh security personnel have already visited these areas to examine security aspects there ahead of the high-profile visit.

However, media reports here said that Modi would pay the visit to Orakandi temple to win over the "Matua" community voters ahead of the West Bengal state government polls scheduled to begin on March 27.

The state assembly election would be held in eight phases. The "Matua" community votes are believed to be a decisive factor in the North 24-Parganas and Nadia district as the BJP and TMC (Trinamool Congress) are involved in a huge tussle to win over the voters there.

Besides, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jay Shankar will visit Dhaka tomorrow to set agendas regarding the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh.

According to PM Modi's visit schedule, he will arrive in Dhaka on March 26 by a special aircraft and will leave Dhaka for New Delhi on the next day after wrapping up his two-day Dhaka visit. It would be Modi's first foreign visit after the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the first day [March 26], the Indian PM will join the celebration programmes with other dignitaries, and the next day, he will hold a summit with his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh high commissioner sources told BSS recently.

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