

PK Halder, 74 others involved

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In these cases, PK Halder has been made prime accused.

He took loans from financial institutions against at least two dozen non-existent companies created by him.

In some cases, he used part of the funds to repay installments of loans taken against his several fictitious firms.

PK Halder put his men at the helm of the financial institutions so that he could easily take loans from those and misappropriate the funds.

HOW FORGERY TOOK PLACE

Proprietor of Konika Enterprise Ram Prashad Roy applied for a capital loan on November 30, 2017, to the FAS against 200 decimal land worth about Tk 25.6 crore as collateral.

The FAS in its 194 meetings of the board of directors approved Tk 45 crore short-term loan on December 13, 2017.

In the inquiry, the ACC found that PK Halder was actually the owner of the land. Though no money was repaid, the FAS board renewed the loan on December 24, 2018. During the inquiry, the balance of the loan was found about Tk 49.18 crore.

Whereas the money was supposed to be used by the Konika to purchase capital machinery, the ACC found that of the Tk 45 crore, about Tk 11.32 crore was used to repay the loan of seven companies with IFSL.

About Tk 4 crore was used to adjust MTB Marine's loan with FAS Finance, Tk 5 crore transferred to One Bank's Chattogram Branch's client JK Trade

International's account, Tk 2 crore to Mercantile Bank's Mohakhali Branch's client Fashion Plus's account.

About Tk 18 crore was deposited at Konika Enterprise's account with Bank Asia.

The ACC further found that the JK Trade International's owner Irfan Ahmed Khan operated its One Bank's Chattogram Branch's account no - 074300000281 for only four months.

During this short period, about Tk 20 crore was deposited through eight cheques of different banks.

"The account was closed after the withdrawal of money," said an official.

Three companies including two automobiles and some persons were given money from the account, sources said.

Analyzing Fashion Plus's account no 114711117767985, the ACC found AKM Shahid Reza is its owner. Reza was also a former director of Mercantile Bank.

"It can be assumed that Reza was a beneficiary of the loan forgery," sources said.

On February 13, 2019, about Tk 18 crore was deposited at Konika Enterprises's Bank Asia branch and on the same day about Tk 20 crore was transferred to Peoples' Leasing and Financial Services Ltd, another NBFi which is facing liquidation after massive financial anomalies.

In a similar manner, PK Halder embezzled the money through other fictitious accounts, sources added.

Halder came under the spotlight during the anti-casino drives in the country in 2019.



A healthcare worker in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) treats a patient inside a temporary tent erected outside the emergency ward of a government-run hospital amid the surge of coronavirus disease in Bekasi, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

A country in the grip of fear

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coming, for mile after mile, people of all ages, carrying their cooking pots and little bundles of possessions. Young children were carrying babies a few weeks old. Some people were lying helplessly in the ditches. Some had died in the ditches. The numbers were so vast that our convoy had difficulty in making its way up the road. And so it goes on, sometimes as many as 100,000 new refugees a day reaching India.

"I came away feeling that the appalling events of the last few months might well be leading to an ever deepening tragedy for both countries. This can be averted by a political settlement acceptable to the people of East Bengal. Time is not on anybody's side."

PAKISTAN STILL HOPEFUL OF GETTING US AID

The possibility of Pakistan getting economic aid from the USA still exists, says Radio Pakistan. The Radio quoting officials of the US State Department said that notwithstanding the vote by the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives the possibility of Pakistan getting \$118 million still exists.

PADMA CARRYING ARMS, ADMITS STATE DEPARTMENT

A State Department spokesman admitted that the 6,855-tonne Pakistani freighter Padma, which

dockers in Baltimore had refused to load, was carrying a shipment of arms for Pakistan.

Thomas Gleason, president of the International Longshoremen's Association, instructed dockers not to work on the Karachi-bound freighter because the union wanted to stay neutral in the East Pakistan situation.

The State Department spokesman said an export license for the arms on the Padma was issued before such shipments were banned on March 25.

He said the shipment included spare parts for aircraft, military vehicles, ships and artillery. It also included 2,200 rounds of .22 calibre ammunition, he added.

\$28MM REQUIRED FOR RELIEF IN EAST PAKISTAN

UN officials reported to Secretary General U Thant that \$28 million would be required to meet East Pakistan's initial needs for relief. It was reported that the Pakistan government had submitted to U Thant's representative in Bangladesh a list of relief needs. The list included 250,000 tonnes of food grains, 100,000 tonnes of edible oil, cash grants totalling \$40 million for the people returning to East Pakistan and other affected citizens and several vessels for water and land transport.

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New sections of Jerusalem's

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its First Temple, was shielded by an uninterrupted eastern wall.

The newly discovered segments consist of 14 metres and three metres.

"Now that we found another two sections... we can conclusively say that the City of David in Jerusalem, the eastern slope, was surrounded by a massive wall," archaeologist Filip Vukosavovic, who led the excavation for the Ancient Jerusalem Research Centre, told AFP.

The archaeological site lies in Silwan, a Palestinian neighbourhood in east Jerusalem just south of the Old City. East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day war and was later annexed by the Jewish state.

"The two segments that we found are actually the missing link between the previous two sections found in the City of David, and for years we've been trying to find it," Vukosavovic said.

The City of David, as the biblical patriarch called ancient Jerusalem

after conquering it in the 10th century BC, was capital of the Judean Kingdom, which lasted until 586 BC, when it was overrun by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II and then destroyed.

The Israel Antiquities Authority said Wednesday in a statement: "it seems that the debate has been settled, and that this was unequivocally the eastern wall of ancient Jerusalem."

A stone Babylonian stamp seal depicting gods and a clay stamp seal impression bearing the Judean name 'Tsafan were found near one of the newly unearthed sections.

The entire wall, rising from the bedrock of the sloping hill, was likely built around the eighth century BC, and served "the main defensive line in case of attacks on Jerusalem," Vukosavovic said.

"I can tell you absolutely that when the Babylonians arrived, approximately a year and a half before they destroyed the city, it is this wall they see, stone for stone," he told journalists.

Vice chairman, family

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"Some 200 people of Abdul Quader Mirza attacked our house. They opened fire on our family members, beat us up, exploded bombs and vandalised furniture," he also alleged.

Quader Mirza could not be reached over phone for his comments.

But his personal assistant Swapan Mahmud, also organising secretary of the upazila unit Jubo League, denied the allegation.

Contacted, Saif Uddin, officer-in-charge of Companiganj Police Station, said on information, police rushed to the spot and found a man had sustained bullet injuries and took him to hospital.

Police also recovered four unexploded bombs from the spot. Additional law enforcers have been deployed to avoid further violence, he added.

Political situation of Noakhali's Companiganj has become volatile for the last few months as two groups of ruling AL are at loggerheads over establishing supremacy.

One group is led by Quader Mirza, while another group is led by Mizanur Rahman Badal, organising secretary of Companiganj upazila unit AL.

Multiple deadly clashes took place between the two groups, leaving at least two people dead and many others injured.

Unrest has been prevailing there over the last few months after Quader Mirza on several occasions made comments against corruption and misdeeds committed by the AL men in Noakhali and Fenil.

He even repeatedly criticised his brother Obaidul Quader and his wife.

Strife in JP over new committee

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Rahgir Al-Mahi, who was present at the programme, said he didn't attend the mahfil to make any political statements but to just seek blessings for his mother Raushan Ershad - the leader of the opposition in parliament.

"When my father was ill, my uncle GM Quader forced him [HM Ershad] to make him the party's chairman," Eric said.

The mahfil was presided over by Kazi Mamunur Rashid. Bidisha, and other JP leaders such as Delwar Hossain Khan, Jafar Iqbal Siddiqui also spoke.

After the mahfil ended, JP leaders and members greeted the new committee announced by Eric, now aged 20.

However, discussions are going on at different levels of the party, following Eric's announcement.

Party insiders said Bidisha and Kazi Mamunur, along with a section of

leaders, are involved in the decision of the new committee as they don't want to see GM Quader at the helm of JP.

Meanwhile, GM Quader, at a programme in the capital yesterday, said a child could not declare the formation of a political party.

"There are laws and different policies to form a political party. Besides, without talking to Begum Raushan Ershad, the main patron of the Jatiya Party, how reasonable is it to announce her as the chairman and publish such news in the media?"

He added that the media should have talked to Raushan Ershad before publishing the news.

The JP chief further said they are not giving any importance to the matter and that Eric's announcement will not impact the party.

Claiming that he had spoken to Raushan Ershad over phone on Wednesday, he said, "She made it

clear that she has no desire to be the party chairperson. She also praised various initiatives taken under its present leadership to strengthen the Jatiya Party."

The JP issued a press release that night with Raushan's statement.

Raushan could not be reached for comments.

At a press conference on July 8, Eric said the allegations of money laundering against him and his mother Bidisha were baseless, alleging that his uncle, Quader, was involved in the conspiracy.

"There is no evidence that we laundered money. But he [Quader] is still spreading propaganda."

"My uncle GM Quader will be responsible if anything happens to me and my mother."

On the other hand, JP leaders said they were embarrassed with the latest unrest within the organisation.

Indonesia faces 'worst-case scenario'

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more than that, we're okay. We are hoping not for 100,000, but even if we get there, we are preparing for that," he added.

The government has converted buildings into isolation facilities, deployed fresh graduate doctors and nurses to treat Covid-19 patients and imported oxygen and drugs, he said.

Indonesia's food and drug agency (BPOM) has authorised the anti-parasitic drug ivermectin for emergency use against Covid-19, a health ministry official told Reuters. BPOM did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

While the World Health Organization has recommended it not be used for Covid-19 patients, it has been used in some countries to treat the respiratory disease, including India.

BPOM also approved the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine yesterday, of which Indonesia will receive 50 million doses.

Hospitals in the densely populated Java island have been deluged in recent weeks, with many struggling to get treatment and hundreds dying in self-isolation.

Luhut also said vaccine efficacy was weaker against the Delta variant spreading fast across Java, but urged people to get inoculated to help prevent serious illness and death.

The government was analysing the situation and would decide whether

to extend the restrictions beyond July 20, he said.

COVID 3RD WAVE

The pandemic has killed at least 4,061,908 people since the virus first emerged in December 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data yesterday.

World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus yesterday warned that the pandemic is now in the "early stages" of the third wave, even as he sounded a fresh alarm over a global surge in cases of the Delta variant.

"Unfortunately...we are now in the early stages of a third wave", Ghebreyesus said.

He also said that China must co-operate better in the probe into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, the first cases of which were seen in Wuhan in December 2019.

Meanwhile, WHO's emergency committee warned yesterday that new concerning variants of Covid-19 were expected to spread around the world, making it even harder to halt the pandemic.

"The pandemic is nowhere near finished," the committee said in a statement, highlighting "the strong likelihood for the emergence and global spread of new and possibly more dangerous variants of concern that may be even more challenging to control."

About 12 million Australians will be under stay-at-home orders by late

yesterday as the country's second biggest city Melbourne goes into a "hard and fast" lockdown, joining Sydney.

State premier Dan Andrews said he took the decision to return the city -- and surrounding Victoria -- to its fifth lockdown "with a heavy heart" but it was an "absolute necessity".

In Tokyo -- now just over a week away from the opening ceremony of the virus-postponed Olympics -- local authorities recorded 1,308 new cases, the highest number since January.

Also facing chronic shortages of medical supplies is Myanmar, where residents across the coup-hit country's biggest city defied a military curfew in a desperate search for oxygen to keep their loved ones with Covid breathing.

Millions in Yangon and the second city of Mandalay have been ordered to stay home, but the death toll continues to rise and volunteer teams are stepping in to remove the bodies of victims from their neighbourhoods.

Painting a more optimistic picture despite rising caseloads of its own is neighbouring Thailand, where three more islands opened to vaccinated foreign tourists yesterday as part of the kingdom's push to revive its battered tourism industry.

The country launched a "sandbox" scheme on July 1, allowing vaccinated travellers to visit Phuket island. Tourists do not have to quarantine in a hotel but cannot leave the island for two weeks.

Raw hide price hiked by Tk 5 per sqft

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In the end, lower rates were fixed following protests from leather and leather goods producers and rawhide traders, he said.

Factors such as the impact of the pandemic, leftover stock, and the current global market trend were considered while fixing the prices of rawhide, Ghosh added.

The prices of salt-applied rawhide of goat, a less popular sacrificial animal, would be Tk 14 and Tk 17 per square foot across the country, up from Tk 13 to Tk 15 last Eid.

Female goat skins will sell between Tk 12 and Tk 14 per square foot, up from Tk 10-Tk 12 during last year's Eid.

The higher rate for rawhide comes after the government earlier this week allowed five tanneries to export 1.2 crore square feet of wet blue, which is semi-processed hide, after a gap of 30 years as part of its efforts to prop up demand for rawhide ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

In the last two years, mountains of rawhide were thrown away due to lack of demand. As is custom, the amount raised by selling the rawhide of sacrificial cattle during Eid-ul-Azha is distributed among the poor, so the dumping meant the poor were deprived.

An additional 1 crore square feet of wet blue export will be allowed soon as more companies have sought permission from the ministry,

according to Ghosh.

"It is expected that the demand for rawhide will be higher in the upcoming Eid," he added.

Nearly Tk 600 crore loan has been allowed for the tanners to purchase rawhide from the grassroots this year.

And there is ample stock of salt to process the rawhide.

The current stock of salt in the country is 19.99 lakh tonnes against the estimated demand of 82,190 tonnes during Eid-ul-Azha, according to Zakia Sultana, secretary to the industries ministry.

The central effluent treatment plant at the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate is also functioning this year, said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at the event.

Besides, the Bangladesh Bank has allowed merchants to reschedule their loans taken last year to purchase rawhide by paying only a 3 percent down payment with the view to making more funds available to purchase the skins.

Banks will have to give fresh loans after rescheduling the earlier loans, which can be paid back in three years.

"So, it is expected that the country will not notice the dismal situation in rawhide business this year," Munshi added.

As many as 1.2 crore cattle are ready to be sold ahead of Eid. Of those, 1 crore may be slaughtered, which is more or less the same as last year, according to SM Ferdous, a joint

secretary of the ministry of livestock.

Meanwhile, tanners, rawhide merchants, leather goods and footwear exporters urged the government to allow smooth and hassle-free transportation of rawhide laden trucks during the lockdown.

Saiful Islam, president of Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh, recommended preserving the rawhide at the community centres across the country if there is shortage of space.

The community centres across the country maybe even rented for one month so that the salt-applied rawhide can be preserved, he said.

Aftab Khan, president of the Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants' Association, urged the tanners to pay the previous arrears before the Eid so that they can provide funds to their appointed seasonal traders and dealers for purchasing and collecting the rawhides during Eid, when 50 percent rawhide is collected in a year in Bangladesh.

Shaheen Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Tanners' Association, suggested the government reconsider the permission for wet blue export as the hide can be used for more value addition locally.

In fiscal 2020-21, leather and leather product exports fetched about \$941.7 million, up 18.1 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

Owner, official

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while the firemen rescued 25 from the factory's rooftop.

Soumen Barua, deputy inspector general of the Narayanganj DIFE yesterday told The Daily Star that several more cases will be filed against the factory owner at the labour court if he does not provide compensation for the victims as instructed by the DIFE.

Earlier on June 30, Narayanganj DIFE Labour Inspector Nesar Uddin had filed a case against Abul Hashem and Mamunur Rashid with the labour court under the Penal Code for breaching nine sections of labour law.

The charges include: not using disinfectants (soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray) to ensure health safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, appointing children as labourers, a lack of clean ventilation in the fifth floor of the factory, non-approval of the work schedule notice of the inspector, not having an effective safety committee, not following the rules in setting up machines and equipment, and a lack of electrical safety measures inside the building.

Soumen Barua said the case is under trial.

Hashem, his four sons, and three other officials, including Mamunur Rashid, were arrested after a case was filed against them on charge of burning 51 employees to death.

Life sentence

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Mohammad Shishir Manir, also the head of legal research organisation Law Lab, said more than 5,000 prisoners, who have been sentenced to life imprisonment by courts, will benefit from the apex court verdict.

Those, who have been in prison for 22 and a half years, will be entitled to be released from jail, he said.

Shishir Manir is a lawyer for a convicted prisoner, Aatur Mridha, who filed a review petition on which the Appellate Division of the SC delivered the verdict.

Shishir's client Aatur, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment, will benefit from the SC verdict. He will have to be in jail for two and a half years more.

On December 1, 2020, a seven-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, delivered a short verdict by a majority decision following the review petition filed by Aatur.

Justice Muhamad Imman Ali, senior judge of the bench, disagreed with the six other judges, according to the written verdict.

In the full text of the verdict, the apex court judges observed, "The imprisonment until death has some negative effects within the prison system such as ageing of the prison population and the creation of "super-inmate". Generally, most of the prisoners come from poor and vulnerable communities".

Critics say that life imprisonment denies the prisoner's human rights because it offers no possibility of release and thus no hope for the future.

International human rights law allows life sentences "only in the most serious crimes" and prohibits the use of life imprisonment without parole.

"Life imprisonment, without the possibility of release, leads to indefinite detention in prison, and is known to cause physical, emotional and psychological distress," the apex court said in the full text.

"Prisoners could suffer from ill-health, social isolation, loss of personal responsibility, identity crises, and may even be driven to suicide. The prison is a terrible place to cope with a serious ailment."

"Our prisons are so chock-a-block with inmates that there are not enough spaces for them to sleep. The enormous increase in prison populations has led to severe prison overcrowding."

"The incarceration rates continued to climb throughout the last few decades. In some jails, prisoners have reported sleeping in shifts because there is not enough room in the cells for all of them to lie down at the same time. Overcrowding increases the stress put on the inmates."

Aatur Mridha filed the review petition challenging an apex court verdict that on February 14, 2017 commuted his death penalty to life imprisonment in a murder case.

The Appellate Division bench, headed by the then chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, had said life imprisonment means jail sentence until natural death of the convict.

Aatur submitted the petition to the SC, seeking review of its judgment the same year.

The SC in the full text of verdict stressed the need for a statutory guideline for the sentencing policy.

"There is no guidance to the judge in regard to selecting the most appropriate sentence of the cases. The absence of sentencing guidelines is resulting in wide discretion which ultimately leads to uncertainty in awarding sentences. A statutory guideline is required for the sentencing policy. Similarly, a properly crafted, legal framework is needed to meet the challenging task of appropriate sentencing."