

Why is the govt indulging

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In so doing, Evaly was creating a parallel currency of its own, one for which it has no permission and regulatory oversight.

Not just that, the credit has an expiry date, too. What good would the digital credit be if the products are never delivered? In other words, making a transaction on Evaly is akin to playing Russian roulette with one's money.

And yet, so hypnotic was Evaly's marketing chicanery that people could not resist -- only to be massively disappointed, enough to lodge complaints with the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, a department of the commerce ministry.

When the chorus of complaints became too deafening, the commerce ministry last year commissioned a multi-pronged investigation and out tumbled all the skeletons from Evaly's closet.

The most damning was the probe report from the central bank, for which it found little to no cooperation. And yet, with the documents the six-member BB team managed, one can get a fair idea of the state of Evaly's financials.

As of March 14, Evaly owes about Tk 404 crore to customers and merchants. Its asset then was Tk 65 crore, meaning the company could clear only 16 percent of its liabilities by selling its assets.

Of its total liabilities, Tk 213.9 crore is to customers and Tk 189.9 crore to vendors who supplied merchandise to Evaly.

When the BB report came to light in June, it understandably elicited public outrage and prompted the commerce ministry to bring about a significant change in the way e-commerce platforms would function going forward.

The e-commerce platforms would only get payment upon confirmation of receipt of goods by the customer, inconveniencing those companies that played by the rulebook.

And from Evaly, the commerce ministry demanded answers on how it would clear its liabilities to customers and merchants.

On July 19, the ministry gave Evaly 10 working days to provide some basic information like the total amount it took from customers in advance as of July 15 and how much it paid to merchants with the money.

But the e-commerce platform did not disclose any such information in that timeframe and instead, audaciously sought six months to do so.

The amount of outstanding liability should be readily available in their financial accounts. It is the total amount owed to customers in the form of digital credit, prepayments from merchants, payables to suppliers and service providers such as the courier companies among others.

The letter signed by Mohammad Rassel, chief executive officer of Evaly, bafflingly talks about doing a third-party audit to get such information and submit it to appropriate regulatory authorities.

Does that mean Evaly does not maintain financial accounts? This is an offence in itself.

Or, does Evaly doubt the veracity of its own financial accounts? This only points towards fraud and yet again warrant stern action from the government.

The letter also mentions doing a valuation report, but the solvency or liquidity issues of a company cannot be addressed through such exercise.

This is truly petrifying given the size of Evaly's liabilities, which most likely is much more than the BB report suggests as the company was not forthcoming during the inspection.

In the letter dated July 31, Evaly mentions that it inked an investment deal worth Tk 1,000 crore, of which Tk 200 crore will come in initially, insinuating it has had a massive cash injection to take care of its liabilities.

However, it neither mentioned the name of the company nor the nature, timing and structure of the investment.

While as a privately held company, Evaly is not obliged to provide such details. But if it is presenting the purported investment as the path forward to clearing its liabilities, full disclosure is necessary to emphasise the sincerity of its intent.

That deal though turned out to be with Jamuna Group, which Rassel himself disclosed on his Facebook page on the evening of July 27.

Later, Jamuna Group divulged that the Tk 200 crore of the initial investment was in supplier's credit, which remains outstanding. In other words, Jamuna Group was converting debt into equity, so it is not a cash injection per se.

And the rest of the amount, as per the letter of intent and not a legally binding contract between the two parties, would most definitely be in the form of goods.

But Evaly does not sell only Jamuna Group's products but from a myriad of brands, so Rassel's announcement came across as more of a public relations stunt aimed at getting its jittery vendors to continue to provide it with merchandise and unassuming customers to continue to hand over their money to the platform.

In its letter on July 19, the commerce ministry also asked Evaly what it did with the amount it took from customers and did not pay back to the vendors.

Evaly, as expected, had no answers. But one can deduce where the money went: funding the deep discounts; the overpowering marketing exercise such as frequent advertisement in print and electronic media, sponsorship of government activities such as Digital World 2020, Bangladesh cricket team's tour of New Zealand, Rapid Action Battalion's movie "Operation Sundarbans"; getting brand ambassadors like Tahsan Rahman Khan and influencers; massive salaries which is more than double the industry standard to a large headcount.

So, the longer Evaly is allowed to continue to operate the way it does, its liabilities towards customers and merchants will only grow bigger as more and more gullible customers would be sucked in. A Ponzi scheme usually ultimately involves siphoning the money out -- and this is the only part that may be recoverable or preventable. And that does not require or warrant Evaly to continue operations or be given six months to provide answers to straightforward questions from the commerce ministry.

Does the government not feel a sense of responsibility towards the naive potential customers of Evaly, which is running its promotional campaigns as before?

Should the government continue to let such a company play with ordinary citizens' money like this?

A logical but extremely difficult way forward could be bringing in investment, one that is in cold, hard cash, covers the liabilities and firmly ties Evaly's hands into shifting to a sustainable business model.



Medical workers in protective suits enter a residential compound under lockdown for nucleic acid testing following new cases of the coronavirus disease in Changsha, Hunan province, China yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Positivity rate

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them, 1,157 were in intensive care units (ICUs).

At hospitals treating Covid-19, 61 percent of the general beds and 88 percent of the ICU and High Dependency Unit beds were occupied.

Bangladesh sends

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the US over sanctions and nuclear programmes, also has tension with many of the Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Mahfuzul Haque, a former director of Iran-based Radio Tehran, said Bangladesh maintained a "neither so good nor so bad" relationship.

However, the Bangladesh government's decision to send a delegation to Iran, for the first time, signifies that Dhaka wants to maintain a balanced foreign relation with all the countries, he said.

Woman sues

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Nijhum Dweep launch terminal around 7:00pm, her husband and nine others forced her to a remote area. Then, the husband and two others acted there as guards while seven others raped her.

When she began screaming, to passers-by heard and rushed there. The rapists managed to flee the area by then.

On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued the victim late at night, said Anwarul Islam, officer-in-charge of Hatia Police Station.

The victim filed rape case yesterday afternoon against seven people and her husband was made the prime accused.

While four, including the husband, were arrested, police are conducting drives to arrest the others, the OC added.

Over 11,500

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recalibration counters at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Monday.

He said the recalibration programme has garnered tremendous response since the launch of the counters on July 8.

Most of the people who took part in the programme had overstayed for between three and five years, he added.

The presence of undocumented migrants has led to losses of about RM130 million in annual levy for the Malaysian government, the immigration official said.

In June, Malaysia extended its repatriation recalibration and labour recalibration -- till December 31 this year for migrants living in the country illegally.

The programme is expected to benefit many undocumented Bangladeshi workers in the Southeast Asian country.

Under the schemes, an undocumented migrant worker gets the opportunity to become regularised or return to his home country without facing any legal action.

The recalibration programme was initially implemented from November 16 last year to June 30 this year, according to Bernama, Malaysia's national news agency.

About 8 lakh Bangladeshis are now in Malaysia.

Syrian man arrested in Berlin over Damascus war crime

AFP, Berlin

German police yesterday arrested a Syrian man for war crimes, accusing him of having fired a grenade into a crowd of civilians waiting for food and water from UN relief workers in Damascus in 2014.

At least seven people were killed in the attack allegedly carried out by Moufak Al D. on March 23, 2014, German prosecutors said in a statement.

"The accused is strongly suspected of having committed war crimes. In connection with this, he is also charged with seven counts of murder and three counts of grievous bodily harm," said prosecutors.

At the time of the assault, the suspect is believed to have been a member of the "Free Palestine Movement" which laid siege to the southern Damascus neighbourhood of Yarmuk on behalf of Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Founded in 1957 with tents for Palestinians forced to leave their homes by the establishment of Israel, Yarmuk was once the Palestinian diaspora's largest urban settlement.

It developed into a sprawling neighbourhood that became home to 160,000 Palestinians, as well as Syrians.

But after Syria sank into a civil war in 2011, around 140,000 residents fled Yarmuk in the following year, leaving the rest to face severe food shortages under government siege.

The UN's relief agency for Palestine refugees UNRWA had access to Yarmuk and was able to conduct food distribution there until April 2015, when Islamic State jihadists entered the area.

Pleas unheard, he suffers in silence

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Bangalee community in the UK provided the foreign reserve required to operate Bangladesh Bank and Bangladesh Airlines. The total money raised from the UK was £412,083, of which £378,871 was handed over to the Bangladesh government, according to the book "Bengal Politics in Britain" by Faruque Ahmed.

There were claims of misappropriation of funds but these were subsequently cleared by the Director of Public Prosecution and the British Board of Trade.

Unfortunately, one person who worked for the London Action Committee fell victim to such a false claim. He is Gouranga Saha Roy.

He described his contribution in his own words: "While our freedom fighters were fighting the enemies in the homeland, our mission here was to win international support and solidarity. To this end we took to the streets of London and other major cities, we organised rallies, lobbied the members of the Houses of Parliament, and visited foreign embassies, universities, trade unions, news media and other influential institutions. We published newspapers and other materials and mobilised public opinion for our cause. We continued with this campaign strategy throughout the entire 10 months of the war. In the end we succeeded, our motherland, Bangladesh, was born. I was so proud to have been associated with this epic struggle of independence."

However, following the end of the war, he found that the Bangladesh High Commission in London in their post-war audit report on fundraising, incorrectly named him as one amongst many who did not return all the contribution collected.

Gouranga Saha returned all six receipt books allocated to him as a fundraiser, with the counterfoils and the monies collected to the London Action Committee. Unfortunately, the London Action Committee returned five books from Gouranga Saha Roy to the Bangladesh High Commission, with one book unaccounted for. A couple of weekly newspapers, one in London and one in Bangladesh, picked up this story. Both papers surprisingly picked up only his name

out of 32, published in the report. They did not mention any of the others on the same list and more missing books. One person allegedly lost 17 books, one committee lost 27 books, and they did not feature in either of the papers. All in all, 153 receipt books were unaccounted for.

On being aware of this, Gouranga Saha immediately took up the matter with the Bangladesh High Commission and Gaus Khan, the Chairman of the London Action Committee. They acknowledged he did indeed return the book described in the report as missing. He received signed letters, one from MAL Matin, director of Audit and Accounts at the High Commission and one from Gaus Khan, to confirm this. However, the High Commission would not remove his name from the list until the London Action Committee returned the missing book, which it failed to do. Investigations conducted by Britain's Director of Public Prosecution and the British Board of Trade confirmed that all allegations of financial misconduct as reported in the audit report were groundless and found no evidence of corruption. The High Commission should have rectified their records to reflect the findings, but they did not. As a result, Gouranga Saha's name remained on the list despite his intervention.

He continued communicating with the High Commission for another two years but failed to clear his name. Finally, he wrote the last letter on August 22, 1974 to the high commissioner to help clear his name. No reply was received. After that, his job and family commitments took him away from London and with that, he stopped pursuing the case, as it seemed an impossible task.

Asked about the issue, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said he could not recall the details of what happened then but he acknowledged that freedom fighters like Gouranga Saha Roy should not have suffered from the feelings of bitterness.

"It's an old issue ... but we will look into it if we get any written note," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said he has no idea about the matter. "If he [Gouranga] files a complaint, we will

Pakistan govt accuses AL of massacre

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to public and private buildings, transport and communications and industrial establishments."

"Unmentionable brutalities were committed with the active assistance of Indian armed infiltrators," declared the paper.

The paper further said: "But the Pakistan Army took the initiative on the night of March 25-26 few hours before the Awami League was to strike, and foiled the secessionist bid to break up the country."

It was "to preserve the integrity of

Pakistan that the President ordered the armed forces into action, who struck pre-emptive blows barely a few hours before the Awami League's planned armed uprising and launching of the 'Independent Republic of Bangla Desh'," the paper added.

ANOTHER BANGALI DIPLOMAT QUILTS POST

A second official of the Pakistan high commission in London quitted his senior position "in protest over the situation in East Pakistan". He is MD Akbar Luful Matin, 35, the commission's director of audit and

accounts. CHINESE COASTERS ARRIVE AT CHITTAGONG

Three coasters brought by Pakistan from China arrived at Chittagong today to begin transporting foodgrains. The coasters, each with a capacity of 1,000 tonnes, would be used in coastal and delta water in an effort to alleviate the risk of famine in East Pakistan. The coasters would be manned by the Pakistan navy.

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US, Indonesia commit to S China Sea defense in 'strategic dialogue'

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Tuesday the launch of a "strategic dialogue" with Indonesia, and Washington said the two countries committed to working together on issues that include defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Meeting in Washington, Blinken and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi also committed to work together against Covid-19 and the climate crisis and to boost bilateral trade and economic ties, the State Department said.

Indonesia is the largest country and economy in the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), a bloc Washington sees as key to its efforts to stand up to China's growing influence in Asia.

The two sides agreed to establish a "strategic partnership" in 2015, but

Blinken told reporters while standing alongside Marsudi that the dialogue was only now actually being initiated.

"Indonesia is a strong democratic partner to the United States; we are working together on so many different fronts," he said, adding that Washington appreciated Jakarta's strong voice within Asean.

Marsudi told Blinken a strong partnership with Indonesia would be "a key asset for your increasing engagement in the region."

She said the United States was one of the important partners for Asean in implementing its Indo-Pacific outlook.

"It is my hope, and the Indonesian government's, to advance the bilateral relationship with the US, from health to SDGs, from education, to economy, and beyond," she said, using the acronym for sustainable development goals.

A State Department statement on the meeting said the two discussed steps for pandemic recovery. Blinken noted Washington had donated 8 million vaccine doses to Indonesia, and the countries were also working together on oxygen and therapeutics.

Marsudi and Blinken also "expressed shared views on maritime security" and committed to "defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and continuing collaboration in cybersecurity and preventing cybercrime," the statement said.

It said Blinken commended Indonesia's efforts to support Afghanistan's peace negotiations and stressed the importance of restoring ASEAN member Myanmar to the path to democracy.

On climate, the two sides "discussed opportunities for Indonesia to raise its climate ambition," it said, without elaborating.

WHO calls for moratorium

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"I understand the concern of all governments to protect their people from the Delta variant. But we cannot accept countries that have already used most of the global supply of vaccines using even more of it, while the world's most vulnerable people remain unprotected," Tedros told a press conference.

"We need an urgent reversal, from the majority of vaccines going to high-income countries, to the majority going to low-income countries."

More than 4.25 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines have now been administered globally, according to an AFP count.

In countries categorised as high income by the World Bank, 101 doses per 100 people have been injected -- with the 100 doses mark having been surpassed this week.

That figure drops to 1.7 doses per 100 people in the 29 lowest-income countries.

"Accordingly, WHO is calling for a moratorium on boosters until at least the end of September, to enable at least 10 percent of the population of every country to be vaccinated," said Tedros.

"To make that happen, we need everyone's cooperation, especially the handful of countries and companies that control the global supply of vaccines."

Tedros said the G20 group of nations had a vital leadership role to play because those countries are the biggest producers, consumers and donors of Covid-19 jabs.

"It's no understatement to say that the course of the Covid-19 pandemic depends on the leadership of the G20," he said.

Neanderthals made Spanish

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Francesco d'Errico, co-author of a new paper in the journal PNAS told AFP.

A new analysis revealed the composition and placement of the pigments were not consistent with natural processes -- instead, the pigments were applied through splattering and blowing.

What's more, their texture did not match natural samples taken from the caves, suggesting the pigments came from an external source.

More detailed dating showed that the pigments were applied at different points in time, separated by more than ten thousand years.

This "supports the hypothesis that the Neanderthals came on several occasions, over several thousand years, to mark the cave with pigments," said d'Errico, of the University of Bordeaux.

It is difficult to compare the Neanderthal "art" to wall paintings made by prehistoric modern humans, such as those found in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc cave of France, more 30,000 years old.

But the new finding adds to increasing evidence that Neanderthals, whose lineage went extinct around 40,000 years ago, were not the boorish relatives of Homo sapiens they were long portrayed to be.

The team wrote that the pigments are not "art" in the narrow sense of the word "but rather the result of graphic behaviors intent on perpetuating the symbolic significance of a space."

The cave formations "played a fundamental role in the symbolic systems of some Neanderthal communities," though what those symbols meant remains a mystery for now.