

ACC couldn't probe money launderers in five years

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The High Court five years ago allowed the Anti-Corruption Commission to conduct enquiries and investigations into any type of corruption and take necessary action against the offenders, but the graft watchdog failed to bring the Bangladeshis, who deposited money in overseas banks and purchased properties abroad, to book.

The ACC even could not put forward any findings or information to the HC about those who bought properties in different countries, including Canada and Malaysia with laundered money, despite its repeated directives.

The commission keeps telling the HC that it has limitations with regards to tracing and putting the money launderers on trial under the relevant law.

On January 27, the ACC submitted a report to a HC bench, containing the names of 61 Bangladeshis and seven organisations mentioned in the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers as money launderers.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman is scheduled to hold a hearing on this issue today.

Meanwhile, the ACC has requested the government to make necessary amendments to the money laundering prevention act in order to empower the commission to conduct enquiries and investigations into money laundering.

On March 24, 2017, an HC bench in a verdict allowed the ACC to carry out enquiries and probes into any type of corruption and take necessary actions against the offenders.

"If we consider the above aims and objects of the Anti-Corruption Commission as completed in section 17, in particular 17(ga) and 17(ta) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004, we have no hesitation to hold that to prevent corruption/corrupt, the commission has got unfettered power to make any enquiry, investigation and to take necessary actions/steps in accordance with law as it thinks fit and proper in any form of corruption," the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Shahidul Karim observed in the verdict.

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Children playing on the rail tracks near Khilgaon level crossing, oblivious to the dangers that may befall them. No one seems to have warned them to steer clear of the rail lines. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Delhi keen on inking comprehensive FTA

Bangladesh, India plan to reopen border haats soon, ensure trade via Benapole-Petrapole 24/7

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bangladesh and India have decided to conduct a feasibility study on a comprehensive bilateral free-trade agreement covering goods and services, reopen the border haats and operationalise the busy Benapole-Petrapole trade point round the clock.

The decisions came at a commerce ministry-level meeting in Delhi on Friday.

However, going by the statement issued yesterday by the Indian commerce ministry on the outcome of the meet, no timelines were set for the tasks mentioned above except the words "soon" and "at the earliest."

Noting a major jump in the volume of the bilateral trade in recent years -- with Bangladesh being India's 6th largest trade partner -- India is understood to have emphasised the early conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is more than mere FTA in goods by

including the services keeping in mind the sensitivities of the two sides.

The CEPA with Bangladesh is one of the agreements India is pursuing with priority as it was a key announcement in the joint statement signed during Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka in March last year.

Despite the pandemic, bilateral trade grew 14% from \$9.46 billion in the year 2019-20 to \$10.78 billion in 2020-21.

It is expected to lower non-tariff barriers on the two-way movement of goods between the two countries, opening the potential for more goods to be traded.

But Indian and Bangladeshi officials said much will depend on how the two sides incorporate safeguards in the proposed CEPA to protect their domestic industries against sudden surge in supply of certain goods.

Trade has been one of the key pillars of India-Bangladesh ties and India is going for CEPA at a time when it is also pursuing similar arrangements with the European Union, Canada, Australia and the Persian Gulf countries.

Despite the pandemic, bilateral trade grew 14% from \$9.46 billion in the year 2019-20 to \$10.78 billion in 2020-21.

India and Bangladesh currently have 10 border haats, but all of them had to be shut down due to Covid-19.

With the infection rates considerably low on both sides, the Friday meeting agreed that all border haats, located in the north-eastern Indian states of Tripura and Meghalaya, would be reopened soon.

Another important decision taken was the 24x7 operationalisation of the Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Post considering the huge volume of goods traded through this point, the daily backlog and the considerable delay in cross-border

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TCB starts selling essentials to 1cr families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The sale of some basic commodities by the state-owned Trading Corporation of Bangladesh starts in Dhaka today in the first phase to deliver the items to one crore low-income families at subsidised prices.

Goods will be sold from 150 trucks both in Dhaka north and south city corporation areas on all weekdays but Friday until March 24, the TCB said in a statement yesterday.

The sale in the second phase will continue in the capital from March 27 to April 15.

Each consumer can buy two kgs of sugar at Tk 55 per kg, two kgs of lentil at Tk 65 per kg, two litres of soybean oil at Tk 110 per litre and 2.5 kgs of onion at Tk 30 per kg.

13 die from Covid in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirteen people died from Covid-19 and 368 others tested positive for the virus in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, said the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of Covid deaths in the country rose to 29,077 and the total number of cases went up to 19,46,737.

The current daily positivity rate is 2.11 percent and the overall positivity rate is 14.41 percent. The mortality rate now stands at 1.49 percent.

A total of 17,463 samples were tested in laboratories across the country in the 24-hour period.

Man held over molesting college girl

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was caught red-handed by a mob over molesting a college student in the capital's Shahbagh area yesterday.

The mob beat up Saddam Hossain, 32, a vagabond from Kishoreganj, before handing him over to police, said Moudut Hawlader, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

The OC said the girl, an eleventh grader, was walking in front of a flower shop at Shahbagh around 11:00am. All of a sudden, Saddam grabbed her from behind.

As the girl screamed for help, locals rushed to the spot and caught Saddam.

1 arrested for helping Rohingyas get NIDs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police on Friday arrested a former temporary data entry operator of the Election Commission from Cox's Bazar's Matarbari over helping Rohingya refugees obtain Bangladeshi national identity cards.

A Chattogram court placed arrestee Md Bayan Uddin, 28, on two-day remand yesterday after police produced him before it in a case in this regard, said Faruk Ul Hoque, deputy commissioner of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

CTTC sources said former temporary EC office assistant Joynal, now on bail in the same case, told investigators that Bayan Uddin used to work as data entry operator and helped them get NID cards for Rohingyas in exchange for money.

Slipping out of reach

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to data of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. A week before, the price hovered around Tk 160.

The price of a 5-litre bottle was as high as Tk 830, while the government-fixed rate is Tk 795.

Md Milon, a 72-year-old fruit trader in the capital, said, "I used to buy a litre of soybean oil every week. Now I can only buy one-third of that ... I don't know whom to complain to ... Nobody seems to care about us."

Traders and insiders said the crisis is the result of the stocking tendency within the supply chain after the refiners demanded the commerce ministry increase the price of edible oil to Tk 180 per litre from March 1, up by Tk 12 from the government-fixed price.

Refiners have demanded a hike in the price in a bid to shift the burden of increasing import costs on the shoulders of the consumers, as the international markets also saw a rise in prices due to dry weather in Argentina and Brazil -- two major producing and exporting countries.

Supply concerns in the international market also stem from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

The prices of palm oil and sunflower oil have also surged.

The average price of soybean oil was \$1,596 per tonne in February -- up from \$1,470 the previous month, according to The

World Bank Commodities Price Data.

The quarterly average price of soybean oil was \$1,169 per tonne in January-March last year, it said.

In a letter to the commerce ministry on February 27, edible oil refiners, however, said prices of soybean oil ranged between \$1,700 and \$1,725 per tonne in the international market.

Bangladesh has to depend on the international market to meet 90 percent of its edible oil demand as the country produces only a small quantity of oilseeds. "The demand for loose edible oil has increased so much that we are having difficulty catering to our regular customers," said Md Monir Hossain, owner of Monir Enterprise at the Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

He hung a notice at his store reading, "No soybean oil here".

Mohammad Raju and Mamun Hossain, also traders in Karwan Bazar, said their purchase orders placed with refiners were not being met.

Mofizul Islam, owner of Arif General Store in Mirpur's Shewrapara, said, "This is the first time in 15 years that I am having to wait for sales representatives to come and take my purchase order ... It has been a week and no one has come."

However, Biswajit Saha, director of corporate and regulatory affairs of City

Group, a leading importer and processor, claimed his group did not reduce supply volumes. "We are delivering 2,000 tonnes of edible oil daily," he said.

Didar-Mohd Dabirul Islam, head of finance and accounts of Bangladesh Edible Oil Ltd, said, "We are supplying to the markets but are failing to have any control there as traders are aware about prices being hiked in the international market."

The prices would be somewhat come down if the revenue authorities exempt the 15 percent VAT on edible oil. At present, customers have to count Tk 30 VAT for each litre of bottled soybean oil, he added.

In the face of rising demand, supershop Shwapno has said it would not sell more than one 5-litre soybean oil canister to each customer.

"With a shortage in soybean oil supply compared to the recent increased demand in the market, we have set a quota of one bottle per customer to stop panic-buying and to serve a higher number of customers," said Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI logistics and operator of Shwapno. With soaring demands and losses created due to the current market prices, manufacturers have also reduced their number of deliveries.

"We could not provide soybean oil in 30 of our outlets on Thursday [March 3], he said.

British journo shot and wounded in Ukraine

AFP, London

A British television crew was ambushed outside Kyiv earlier this week, leaving one journalist wounded, their employer Sky News said.

Stuart Ramsay, chief correspondent at Sky News, was hit by a bullet in the lower back on Monday as they drove towards the Ukrainian capital.

Sky News showed footage of the attack late Friday.

Two bullets hit a camera operator's body armour. The five-person crew escaped their car and was later rescued by Ukrainian police.

A Russian saboteur reconnaissance squad is suspected of carrying out the attack, Sky News said.

"Bullets cascaded through the whole of the car, tracers, bullet flashes, windscreen glass, plastic seats, the steering wheel, and dashboard had disintegrated," Ramsay said in a written account. The news crew is now safe and back in the UK, while their Ukrainian producer is with his family in Ukraine.

"The point is we were very lucky," Ramsay said. "But thousands of Ukrainians are dying, and families are being targeted by Russian hit squads just as we were, driving along in a family saloon and attacked."

A charge sheet taking forever

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"We don't know the wait will ever be over. The government keeps protecting the ruling party men linked to the murder," a frustrated Rafiur Rabbi, Taqi's father, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

He said the investigators showed their competence by identifying the killers within a year, but they could not submit the charge sheet due to political pressure on the investigation agency.

He hoped justice for Taqi would be done someday and that the Awami League government would be "put in the dock for blocking the murder trial".

Taqi went missing after he left his Shaista Khan Road home in Narayanganj for Sudhijon Pathagar, a local library, around 4:00pm on March 6, 2013.

A day after his body was found, his A-level results were out, which showed he got the world's highest mark in physics in that exam, obtaining 297 out of 300.

According to the Rab report, Ajmeri Osman killed Taqi as his father Rafiur Rabbi, a left-leaning leader and a cultural organiser, along with his supporters actively campaigned for Selina Hayet Ivy ahead of the Narayanganj City Corporation election.

The report clearly mentioned the role of each of the 11 accused in the murder.

The other accused are Yusuf Hossain Liton, Sultan Shawkat alias Bhromor, Tayebuddin Jaky, Rajib, Kalam Shikder, Mamun, Apu, Kajol, Shipon, and Jamshed Hossain.

Rab had arrested Liton, Bhromor, Jaky and two

other suspects -- Rifat Bin Osman and Salah Rahman Simanta. All of them are now out of jail on bail.

Liton and Bhromor made confessional statements before courts under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in July and November 2013, narrating details from the murder planning to the execution.

Bhromor, however, appealed to the magistrate concerned later, seeking withdrawal of his statement.

A few months after Taqi murder, Rab members raided Ajmeri's Winner Fashion office and seized a pair of blood-stained jeans, a pistol butt and items for yaba consumption. Officials also found numerous bullet marks on the walls, almirah and sofa there.

The Rab report also mentioned that the force recovered the truncheons used to torture Taqi to death.

Besides, Taqi Mancha, a platform demanding justice for the murder, claimed on several occasions that Winner Fashion was one of the six "torture cells" identified by it.

Despite all this, Taqi's killers are still at large, as a top AL leader is defending the influential Osman family in Narayanganj, alleged Rafiur Rabbi.

He also alleged that his son's murder probe got stalled after that top leader, while speaking in parliament on a condolence motion on the death of Nasim Osman in June 2014, claimed propaganda was being spread against the Osman family.

For comments, The Daily Star repeatedly called Ajmeri

over the phone on Friday, but he did not respond.

The probe report said another reason for the murder was that Rafiur Rabbi led a massive movement against transport owners' bid to hike bus fare on the Dhaka-Narayanganj route.

Rabbi recently said the bus owners were subservient to Shamim Osman.

The day Taqi's body was found, he filed a murder case with Narayanganj Kotwali Police Station. Later, on March 18 that year, he submitted a complaint to the superintendent of police against seven people, including Shamim Osman, and 8-10 unnamed others.

Shamim could not be reached over the phone for comments yesterday.

The home ministry on June 20, 2013, handed the case to Rab upon a High Court order following an appeal by Rafiur Rabbi.

Contacted on Thursday, Rab-II Commanding Officer Lt Col Tanvir Mahmud Pasha said the investigation was still going on and completing it would take a long time.

"There are no barriers or pressures on anyone. Cracking mysteries in some complex cases takes time... the probe [in Taqi murder] will be over at the right time."

Refuting the allegation that the investigation agency was under political pressure, he said Rabbi was making such allegations because he is the father of the victim.

The Rab CO also said, "We have solved many clueless murder cases. But we want no innocent person to be accused ... I hope you will

see something over this case soon."

Asked about the then Rab top official's comment in 2014 on submitting the charge sheet "any day", Tanvir said there was no scope of filing it before the investigation ended.

As his attention was drawn to the matter, Omar Faruk, professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University in Tangail, said, "The state has to take the responsibility as the criminal justice system itself has become questionable here."

Sailors

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Foreign Minister Momen said the government was verifying a video clip of five Bangladeshis, who claimed that they were stranded at a camp there and being used as human shields by the Ukrainian soldiers.

Meanwhile, some 600 Bangladeshis were evacuated to Poland, but others were still in some pockets of Ukraine, officials said.

Momen said Dhaka was in talks with the Indian embassy in Ukraine for their rescue.

Asked about Bangladesh's neutral position at the UN General Assembly voting on a resolution that reprimanded Russia, he said Dhaka continues to have the same stance.

"We want peace, stability. If there is instability anywhere, we will also be affected."

He said Bangladesh is deeply concerned over the war in Ukraine and wants a solution to it through dialogues.