

PK HALDER QUIZZING

Names of 3 Bangladeshi businessmen come up

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Delhi

The names of at least three influential Bangladeshi businessmen were mentioned during the interrogation of Proshanta Kumar Halder aka PK Halder, who is accused of embezzling Tk 3,000 crore.



The Daily Star could not have the names confirmed by the authorities or reliable sources.

Halder, who is being quizzed by India's Directorate of Enforcement (ED), also revealed names of some people in West Bengal who have links to ruling politicians in the state, sources said.

He had been on the run from facing money laundering charges since 2019 and was arrested in West Bengal on May 14.

The ED produced Halder and five of his associates before a special court yesterday and sought more days for custodial interrogation, which was granted.

The court then directed the ED to produce the six before it again on July 20.

The directorate is currently investigating how many properties Halder purchased in India.

ED sources said Halder's links with politicians in West Bengal are being probed because he could not have set up his network of contacts and real estates without local connections.

The ED has intensified its interrogation in order to prepare a charge sheet to be filed against Halder with the PMLA court, the sources said.

Halder was arrested after the directorate carried out searches out at the request of the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The search operations led to the detection of a huge number of properties, including houses, and many important documents, including land deeds.

The ED said Halder had been posing himself as an Indian citizen called "Shibshankar Halder" after fraudulently obtaining various government identities like ration card from West Bengal, Indian Voter ID card, PAN and Aadhar card.

The ED has ascertained that he managed to float companies in India on the basis of fake identities and documents. He also purchased immovable properties at various places, including in plush localities of Kolkata.

Between 2009 and 2019, he and his associates allegedly swindled about Tk 10,000 crore from four non-banking financial institutions -- Reliance Finance People's Leasing and Financial Services, FAS Finance and International Leasing, and Financial Services.



Fishermen catching fish near the Inani beach in Cox's Bazar recently, defying the government's 65-day ban on fishing. The restriction, to ensure smooth breeding of fish, was imposed from May 20 and will end on June 23.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Donetsk braces for brutal war

Ukraine forces gather for defence as Putin eyes entire Donbas; Finland, Sweden sign protocol to join Nato

AGENCIES

Fighting raged in and around Ukraine's eastern Donbas region yesterday as Russian troops tried to build on recent battlefield gains, while Nato pressed ahead with Finland and Sweden's momentous membership bids.

With the war well into its fifth month, Kyiv's allies yesterday committed to supporting Ukraine through what is likely to be a lengthy and expensive recovery, agreeing on the need for broad reforms to boost transparency and tackle corruption.

The two days of talks in the Swiss city of Lugano heard that rebuilding the war-ravaged country is estimated to cost at least \$750 billion.

But on the battlefield, the conflict continued to wreak devastation, with the Ukrainian president's office reporting Russian shelling and missile strikes in several regions overnight.

Russian forces set their sights on their next objectives in Ukraine's

eastern Donetsk province yesterday after President Vladimir Putin claimed victory in neighbouring Luhansk province.

"Military units, including the East group and the West group, must

"I hope that everything will continue in their direction as has happened in Lugansk so far."

— Putin

carry out their tasks according to previously approved plans," Putin said.

"I hope that everything will continue in their direction as has happened in Lugansk so far."

The capture of the city of Lysychansk on Sunday completed the Russian conquest of Luhansk, one of two regions in Donbas, the industrialised eastern region of Ukraine that has become the site of the biggest battle in Europe in generations.

Both sides have suffered heavy casualties in the fight for Luhansk, particularly during the siege of the twin cities of Lysychansk and Severodonetsk. Both cities have been left in ruins by relentless Russian bombardment.

Ukrainian forces yesterday took up new defensive lines in Donetsk, where they still control major cities.

Russian forces shelled the towns of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk overnight, according to Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of Donetsk.

"They are now also the main line of assault for the enemy," he said of the towns. "There is no safe place without shelling in Donetsk region."

Since the outset of the conflict, Russia has demanded that Ukraine hand both Luhansk and Donetsk to pro-Moscow separatists, which have declared independent statelets.

In Moscow, the defence ministry reported that Russian forces had targeted the city of Kharkiv with "high precision" weapons over the past 24 hours, killing up to 150 Ukrainian servicemen.

5 killed after truck hits easy bike in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Five people were killed and two more injured after a garbage truck hit an easy-bike in Rangpur city yesterday.

The dead were identified as Raza Mia, 46, Jannatul Mawa, four, Gita Rani, 60, Shahjahan Mia, 55 -- all passengers of the easy-bike.

The two injured are currently at Rangpur Medical College Hospital for treatment, police said.

Masud Alam, senior station officer of Rangpur's Fire Service and Civil Defence, confirmed the incident in the afternoon.

Pirgachha police, quoting witnesses, said the easy-bike reached the city from Pirgachha upazila with around seven passengers.

As the vehicle arrived at Mahiganj (Shareyartal), the truck hit the easy bike, leaving two people dead on the spot and injuring around five, said police.

Later, locals rescued the injured and took them to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, where three of them succumbed to their injuries immediately after being admitted.

Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mahiganj Police Station, said police seized the truck and were looking for the driver, who fled after the accident.

All Bangladeshi pilgrims reached Saudi Arabia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the Bangladeshi pilgrims have reached Saudi Arabia, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh said yesterday.

A total of 60,146 Bangladeshi pilgrims reached Saudi Arabia on 164 flights, it added.

Biman flew 30,363 of them on 87 flights while Saudia and Flynas carried the rest, CAAB said.

The hajj flights started on June 5. Post-hajj flight from Saudi Arabia will start on July 14.

In 2019, around 1.27 lakh Bangladeshis performed hajj. But the largest annual Muslim congregation is being held on a limited scale since 2020.

Introduce biometric identification in prisons, police stations

HC directs home ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court directed the government to introduce biometric identification at police stations and prisons across the country to prevent instances of mistaken identity.

The court ordered the home secretary to have finger print, palm print and iris scanners alongside the existing crime data management system at the police stations.

The court said these in the full text of a verdict released recently.

The HC also asked the home ministry to include mugshots upon arresting a suspect with the current identification. The mugshots should be in an integrated database.

The petitioner's lawyer, Mohamamd Shishir Manir told this correspondent that the inclusion of biometric systems at prisons and police stations will reduce wrongful arrests and detentions.

Load shedding

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The prime minister said this at a function at the PGR Headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment to mark the President's Guard Regiment's (PGR) founding anniversary.

She joined the programme from the Gono Bhaban.

She said that the country witnessed 8-10 hours of power cuts in the past from when her government, taking over office in 2009, increased the electricity generation ensuring an uninterrupted power supply in the country.

She mentioned that the government has accomplished the feat of reaching electricity to every house.

The PM said there won't be any indiscriminate load shedding. It will be announced earlier for a specific area and for a specific time, she added.

"If we specify the time for load shedding for specific areas... If we take that step from now on... we will be able to save ourselves from the much harder days coming ahead," she said.

Talking about the recent economic turmoil across the globe due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, she said that the prices of fuel oil have soared.

As a result that there is a scarcity of power in many countries around the world, she said.

She said that the prices of electricity-producing like diesel, fuel oil, and LNG, have increased heavily.

Besides, transportation has been hampered due to the Russia-Ukraine war compounding the crisis, she said. She added that even

coal is not available.

Hasina reiterated her call to maintain austerity and increase savings which will be beneficial to face any type of crisis in the future.

"If every family resorts to pro-savings mentality and utilises their own lands for optimum productivity (of food grains), it will bring positive results," she said.

She reiterated her call not to leave a single inch of land uncultivated and make sure no water body remains unutilised.

"All empty places have to be utilised for production, whatever it is. We have to try to produce our own food to reduce pressure on the market and make a profit through selling the surplus foods," the premier said.

She said that every person, family and organisation have to take that step.

"I think, if we take this step then we will be able to save ourselves from the ongoing economic shock worldwide."

Hasina said that many countries including America and Britain facing higher inflation amid a scarcity of power.

Teacher

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The court also fined the teacher Tk 20,000, in default, to suffer six months more in jail, said public prosecutor Mezbah Uddin.

"The case was in Dhaka Cyber Tribunal, but it was forwarded to Chattogram for trial," he added.

Six witnesses testified in the case and police conducted a forensic test of his mobile phone. He also gave a confessional statement under section 164 of CrPC, said the lawyer Mezbah.

When trust takes a back seat

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about 8,250 decimals of land in the Rupganj mouzas on April 19, 2016. The NSU paid Tk 500 crore through pay orders and cheques before and after the land registration.

Between 2019 and 2021, the NSU bought another 846.88 decimals of land at Tk 35.19 crore from the developer company.

The ACC considered the price of adjacent land in the same mouza that were sold to others as the standard price, and found that the NSU paid an additional Tk 303.82 crore, reads the case statement.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Rafiqul Islam Hilaly, brother of accused Amin Md Hilaly, said "unidentified men" picked his brother up on Friday and recorded his statement about the case after taking his signature and fingerprints.

Rafiqul, a director of Ashalaya Housing and Development, claimed his brother was found blindfolded on Sunday in Hemayetpur, Savar.

Asked about his brother's involvement with the alleged bribery, he said "I can't say clearly about it. But from what I know, in such cases, there is involvement of a middleman who brings clients. The middleman is given commission."

Before the ACC sued them, two separate investigations by the University Grants Commission in 2016 and 2019 found alleged misappropriation of money by some trustees.

NSU Vice-Chancellor Prof Atiqul Islam declined to comment on the alleged misappropriation, saying, "The matter is under trial. We want the law to take its own course."

At least two UGC members confirmed to The Daily Star that their investigations in 2016 and 2019 found that NSU bought the land at prices much higher than the market rate.

One of the members said they found the NSU board of trustees pocketed more than Tk 300 crore.

Aziz Al Kaiser Tito, a businessperson who joined the NSU trustee board last year, declined to comment on the alleged corruption that he said took place about 10 years ago.

But he said it was a custom around the world that trustees are paid handsome allowances for attending meetings, which in NSU's case sometimes run for four to five hours.

OTHER ANOMALIES

The accused trustees have also illegally taken large amounts of money in sitting allowance through attending various committee meetings, and enrolling students for unapproved courses, the UGC probes found.

One UGC member involved in both the UGC probes said many NSU trustees took Tk 50,000 to 1 lakh each for attending a single committee meeting.

A syndicate member can get a maximum of Tk 10,000 for attending any meeting and that is also applicable for board of trustee members, said a

senior UGC official.

The Private University Act allows a university to have nine committees on different matters. But the UGC found NSU had more than 20. Many of these committees were unnecessary and were formed simply to fatten the bank accounts of the trustees by giving them a high amount of sitting allowance, the UGC found.

Asked, NSU VC Atiqul said, "The board fixes the sitting allowance from time to time. It is a matter for the board."

When pointed out that he too sits on the board, he said, "I am an ex-officio member and I don't fix this [sitting allowance] on my own."

Education ministry sources said NSU purchased 10 luxury cars -- eight Range Rovers, one Mercedes Benz and one Toyota Prado -- for several trustees.

The cars were bought from January 2019 to January 2022 for Tk 26.95 crore, with each costing between Tk 1.1 crore and Tk 2.9 crore.

According to the Private University Act, private universities must have a general fund meant to be spent only on research and education development. But NSU spent the money on matters unrelated to education and research, said a secondary and higher education division order on May 17.

The same order asked the NSU authorities to sell cars through an open tender and deposit that

money in the general fund for spending in educational development and research.

"We have taken an initiative to sell the cars. We will do it in a very transparent way, so that we get the best price. I will make sure of that," the NSU VC said.

The UGC investigations also found that the NSU has been running several BBA programmes without UGC's approval for at least 10 years.

NSU has approval for running Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), but it has been running General BBA, as well as BBA in Finance, Human Resource Management, International Business, Marketing, Management, Management Information System, Accounting, Economics, Entrepreneurship and Supply Chain Management.

One UGC investigator said NSU was allowed to enrol 50 students in approved BBA programmes, but in one semester it enrolled about 2,700 students.

UGC member Prof Biswajit Chanda said they marked NSU in the "red category" for running unapproved courses.

Prof Atiqul claimed all courses had the necessary approval. "The process to renew the approval is underway and is at the advanced stage."

He said NSU got approval of the BBA programme and course structures, and the contents for 10 major courses under that programme are also approved.

RMG worker

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workers. He had asked for leave again while at work but was denied once again, they said.

After he collapsed, he was rushed to the factory's medical centre and was later shifted to Al Hera Hospital in Mawna union. The emergency doctor there declared him dead.

The Daily Star could not learn the cause of his death or the reason behind his illness yet.

Protesting Jahidul's death, the factory workers attempted to demonstrate on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway but were obstructed by police.

Arifur Rahman Rahat, the admin manager of the factory, admitted Jahidul was ill and possibly died due to "heart failure".

He, however, claimed he did not receive Jahidul's leave application.

Ukraine accused of torturing war prisoners

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said it was investigating the torture of Russian soldiers held prisoner in Ukraine and recently released as part of a prisoner swap with Kyiv in late June.

The Russian Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a statement that it was "verifying facts of inhuman treatment of Russia soldier prisoners in Ukraine".