

Framed by DB, two men have their names cleared at last

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two men, framed by the Detective Branch of police for the possession of fake bank notes, won the legal battle they have been fighting for six years to clear their names.

Judge Tahsin Iftekhhar of the Metropolitan Special Tribunal-15 in Dhaka today acquitted Hasan Majumdar, manager of a city hotel, and Soheli Rana, chef of the same hotel, as charges brought against them could not be proved beyond doubt, said court sources.

During a raid at Hotel Bondhu in the capital's Paltan on November 6, 2016, plainclothes detectives detained the duo. The event was recorded in the hotel's security camera.

A sub-inspector of the DB then filed a case against them with Motijheel Police Station under the Special Powers Act.

The first information report, prepared by the police, depicted a completely different story.

According to this document, the DB arrested the duo in the Fakirapool area around 4:15pm on November 6, 2016, while they were fleeing with fake bank notes worth Tk 25 lakh.

Hasan, however, alleged that the false FIR was written because he refused to give the detectives Tk 3 lakh in bribe during the raid.

The next year, Sub-Inspector Dewan Uzzal Hossain, one of the officers who conducted the raid and also the investigation officer of the case, pressed charges against Hasan and Soheli.

After the incident, the victim Hasan and his brother Hossain Majumdar also filed several complaints against nine DB men with the Police Headquarters, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Prime Minister's Office and the home ministry, seeking a remedy.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with deputy commissioners at Shapla Hall of the Prime Minister's Office after addressing the inaugural ceremony of DC conference as the chief guest yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

LEOPARD TANKS FOR UKRAINE

Germany promises swift answer

Encourages allies to start training Ukrainians; Kyiv purges officials in biggest shake-up of war

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday said it would decide "shortly" whether to authorise the export of powerful German-made Leopard battle tanks long sought by Kyiv and encouraged allies to start training Ukrainian forces to use them.

While Western nations have pledged ever more sophisticated military hardware in recent weeks to help Ukraine repel Russia's invasion, all eyes in Kyiv are on the battle tanks.

Berlin yesterday stopped short of granting permission for the transfer but underscored that a decision was imminent, provoking a defiant response from the Kremlin.

Poland also upped the ante by putting forward a formal application for the delivery of the German-made tanks from its stocks to Ukraine.

But in Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was battling a deepening corruption scandal within his government, sacking several officials over graft while others resigned.

Ukraine and several of its allies have been urging Germany for weeks to allow the delivery of the Leopards, but a US-led

meeting of Kyiv's allies in Germany last week failed to yield a decision.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius indicated that the moment of truth could be imminent, saying he had "expressly encouraged partner countries that have Leopard tanks that are ready for deployment to train Ukrainian forces on these tanks".

"I expect a decision to be made shortly," he added following talks with Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Berlin.

Stoltenberg welcomed the "clear message" from the minister because it "will take some time" to ready the tanks and train Ukrainian soldiers to use them after a decision on their delivery.

"We must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster," Stoltenberg said, adding that he expected a decision by Berlin "soon".

Moscow shows no signs of changing course in its invasion, Stoltenberg added, noting that Russia has mobilised more than 200,000 troops and is acquiring new weapons from countries like North Korea or Iran.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the delivery of the tanks would "bring nothing good to the future relationship" between Berlin and Moscow.

"They will leave a lasting mark," he warned.

Under Germany's war weapons control rules, countries using German-made armaments are required to seek Berlin's permission if they wish to transfer them to a third party.

Poland, one of the loudest voices calling for permission to send Leopard tanks, said earlier this month it was ready to deliver 14 of them to Kyiv within the framework of an international coalition of countries.

Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak on Tuesday said the country had now sent in a formal request.

Confirming receipt, a German government spokesman said it would be examined "with necessary urgency".

Meanwhile, local media reports in Ukraine last week accused the ministry of having signed a deal at prices "two to three times higher" than current rates for basic foodstuffs.

Several officials resigned yesterday over the allegations, including a deputy defence minister, two deputy ministers of development of communities and territories, and a deputy minister of social policy.

Five sent to jail over fraudulence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A Dhaka court yesterday sent five men to jail on charges of fraudulence after they were arrested by Rab from the capital's Mirpur on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team arrested Shohel Rana, 37, Moinul Islam Mithu, 28, Hafizur Rahman, 40, Ibrahim, 30, and Al-Amin, 23. The arrestees, who posed as government officials, were accused of promising jobs to unemployed individuals in exchange for money, said Major Alamgir Hossain, company commander of Rab-4 CPC-I.

Fake appointment letters, identity cards, and uniforms of different law enforcement agencies were recovered from their possession, he added.

A case was filed with Mirpur Model Police Station in this regard.

12 brick kilns fined Tk 69 lakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

The Department of Environment (DoE) yesterday fined 12 brick kilns in Jamalpur Sadar upazila a total of Tk 69 lakh for violating DoE guidelines.

The errant brick kilns were fined during multiple drives in different areas of the upazila led by Rubel Mahmud, executive magistrate and deputy director of Mymensingh DoE.

DoE also demolished Kakoli Brick Kiln and ordered it to cease operations as they were found to burn plastic and wood instead of coal, said Masud Rana, assistant director of DoE's Jamalpur office.

The drives were part of an anti-pollution campaign to promote environmental conservation efforts.

One killed, two injured in Nepal quake

AFP, Kathmandu

One person was killed and two were injured after an earthquake struck western Nepal yesterday, a local official told AFP, with authorities still searching for damage.

The 5.6-magnitude quake's epicentre was in hilly Bajura district, 400 kilometres (250 miles) west of Kathmandu, according to the US Geological Survey.

The jolt hit at around 2:43 pm (0858 GMT), with tremors felt as far away as India's capital New Delhi, where buildings briefly shook.

One woman was reported dead, two people were injured and up to 40 houses damaged, district chief Pushkar Khadka told AFP.

Govt doing opposite of what's needed

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There is also no reason to assume all ADP expenditures are equally employment generating, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Expenditure austerity is needed particularly in domestically-financed ADP projects to contain domestic demand growth, Hussain said.

But that does not appear to be the case.

"This is strange because if the idea is to protect employment while alleviating pressure on foreign exchange reserves and inflation, it is the externally funded projects that should get high implementation priority. The proposed ADP revision is in the opposite direction."

In the current macroeconomic context, inflation reduction and alleviation of foreign exchange shortage have to be the top policy priorities, according to Hussain.

Inflation averaged 8.76 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year, up from 5.7 percent a year earlier, according to data from the

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

As of January 18, foreign currency reserves stood at about \$32.5 billion, down 28.1 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank. This is enough to cover about three-and-a-half months' import bills.

"It's all good that the government wants to invigorate economic activities by using more of its own funds towards ADP, but from where would they get the dollars? In domestic-funded projects, I have to pay for the imports," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

In foreign-funded projects, the imports are made using the dollars coming in, leaving some surplus dollars in the central bank's coffers.

"They cut foreign funds because they can't utilise it -- that is their ineptness. The original strategy was the right one -- this is the time to accelerate the utilisation of foreign funds and minimise the domestic-funded projects."

The move will heap pressure on

the balance of payment, said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank, adding that there will be a drain on dollars.

"The import pressure is already high now and we are not getting the dollars for that. Imagine what will happen if the dollar crunch intensifies. This is a short-term vision."

The move will fuel inflation further, said Mansur, a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

Under the current circumstances, the government has to borrow much for public expenditure and deficit financing, and that is already having an adverse impact on the economy, said Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The reason being the borrowing is from the BB, which is always inflationary.

Foreign-funded projects and projects will fewer imports must be given priority, he said, adding that a bigger cut in the ADP budget would be beneficial for the economy.

Kamal unveils list of top 20

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The idea of publishing such a list of defaulters is good as they will be punished socially due to the disclosure, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"But the names of notorious habitual defaulters were absent from the list, so it has raised a question," he said.

The disclosure has not reflected the actual scenario of the defaulted loans, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

"I think those who might have faced closure of their businesses were revealed by the finance minister in parliament."

The politically-backed defaulters have rescheduled their defaulted loans under a central bank's relaxed rescheduling facility just before the pandemic, he said.

In May 2019, the central bank allowed defaulters to reschedule their classified loans by making a down payment of only 2 percent instead of 10-50 percent.

Besides, the tenure for repayment was 10 years with a grace period of one

year.

The central bank also allowed all borrowers in banks to avoid the default zone in 2020 even if they did not pay any instalment of their loans throughout the year.

Borrowers enjoyed the relaxed repayment facility until last year as the central bank allowed them to avoid being classified as a defaulter if they cleared 50 percent of their instalments payable in the final quarter of 2022.

"The habitual defaulters have bagged the advantages of the relaxed policies to avoid the default zone. But they should not be allowed to do so," said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

He suggested the government take strict measures against the defaulters to bring back discipline in the banking sector.

The relaxed rescheduling and loan repayment facilities have facilitated the delinquent borrowers to avoid the list, said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

He recommended the central bank take action against all defaulters to recover the classified loans.

Classified docs found

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contain sensitive or classified information interspersed throughout the records," Jacob wrote in the letter.

With agreement by the former vice president, FBI agents came to his Indiana home at 9:30pm on Jan. 19 to collect the documents stored in the safe, Jacob said.

Biden, whose documents dated from his time as vice president, and Trump, who resisted turning over the items, leading to an FBI raid, are both facing special counsel investigations by the Justice Department over improper handling of classified materials.

Sources familiar with the process say Pence's discovery of classified documents after the Trump and Biden controversies would suggest a more systemic problem related to classified material and the Presidential Records Act, which requires official records from the White House to be turned over to the National Archives at the end of an administration.

From slumber to whirr of machines

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The authorities, however, said they will plant three times more trees than whatever will be felled for building the depot and have already paid compensation to almost all the households that need to be relocated.

The 31.24km rail line will have two parts -- a 19.87km part from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Kamalapur (Airport route) will be underground, while an around 11.36km part will be elevated from Notunbazar to Purbachal (Purbachal route).

The airport route will have 12 stations and the Purbachal route will have nine, seven of which will be above the ground.

Two stations on the Purbachal route -- Nadra and Notunbazar -- will be underground and used as a transit for passengers to switch routes.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved the project in October 2019. Of the total cost, the government will provide Tk 13,111 crore and Japan Tk 39,450 crore as soft loan.

The physical work was supposed to begin in December 2020, but was delayed mainly due to a hold-up in completing the detailed design and the tendering process because of the pandemic.

For this, the authorities are unlikely to meet the fresh deadline

set for December 2026.

Once completed, the rail line will be able to carry eight lakh passengers daily.

Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), the implementing agency of the metro rail project, already signed a contract with a Japan-Bangladesh joint-venture firm to develop the depot. The firm of Japan's Tokyu Construction Co Ltd and Bangladesh's Max Infrastructure Ltd will do this within 910 days for Tk 607.65 crore.

SPOT VISIT

Upon visiting Pitalganj on January 17, this correspondent saw the area acquired by DMTCL for the depot was marked by concrete pillars and all the big trees in the area were marked with different numbers.

Around 11:30am, five to six people were seen chopping some of the marked trees down.

Fifty-year-old Abdul Mannan was one of them.

Abdul already received the compensation money as his 12.5 decimal land fell into the area acquired by the DMTCL.

"The trees are owned by one of my relatives. We were asked to clear the land, so the trees had to be sold out.

"I was born and brought up here. But now I have to leave the area." Abdul has bought four decimals of

land in Gausia area for his relocation, he told this correspondent.

A few yards away, three people were seen dismantling a house, while two others were taking apart another one.

Mazharul Islam, another villager, said that 25 decimals of his land was acquired for the project but he is yet to receive compensation.

"There are some disputes over the land's ownership, for which the payment is being delayed."

He, however, said the poor are not being adequately compensated as they have to pay at least 10 percent of it to local brokers, who have developed a strong syndicate, allegedly with the involvement of some local land office staffers.

Two staffers of Max Infrastructure Ltd were seen conducting surveys there to install instruments for monitoring purposes.

Asked, MAN Siddique, managing director of DMTCL, said they have paid all the compensation money to the district administration and most of the affected people have received their shares.

Asked about those who did not receive it, he said there may be some problems regarding land ownership, but those are only a few cases.

He added that, as per the law, they have paid thrice the existing price of land and twice the existing price of

physical structures.

EFFECTS ON HOUSEHOLDS, TREES

At least 4,632 people have been identified as affected as they will lose their residential and/or commercial structures, trees, ponds and other minor infrastructures, reads the project document.

It added that 513 households will be displaced, while 404 households will lose their commercial structures, 21 will lose both homestead and commercial or business establishments, and 181 will lose their trees and other minor structures.

Moreover, 42 establishments like mosques, temples, educational institutions, graveyards, and offices will be affected, it said.

The project will require the felling 125,562 trees of various sizes and categories. Of those, 73,830 are large, 8,751 are medium, 5,507 are small and 37,474 are saplings.

Asked about the cutting down of so many trees, MAN Siddique said they will plant three times what will be chopped down.

"You can see how many trees we have planted in the Diabari MRT Line-6 depot. We will do the same here," he told this correspondent on January 22.

He added that almost all the trees in the area have to be cut down as there are barely any of them along the metro rail alignment.