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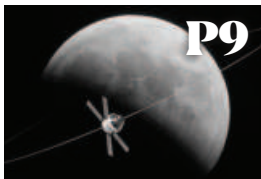
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Tk 821 crore laundered in name of export

Fraudsters used fake shipping documents to siphon off the sum to 25 countries; customs to file case soon

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

In one of the biggest money laundering scams unearthed so far in the country, customs authorities have found that 33 readymade garment factories and buying houses laundered at least Tk 821 crore over the last six years.

For the illicit money transfer, the fraudsters employed two tactics – under invoicing and using wrong shipping code. In the first case, prices were shown up to 10 times lower than the actual rate. In the second case, shipments were shown as “samples” when they were actually exports worth hundreds of crores of taka.

“We have never before identified such a large-scale export forgery. In the past, we had information about money laundering involving 10 or 15 consignments. Irregularities involving so many consignments together never caught our attention.”

Mohammad Bashir Ahmed
Additional director general of CIID, Chattogram office.

“Multiple gangs are involved here. We have found links of many powerful organisations and individuals at home and abroad. A case will be filed against them very soon,” a Chattogram customs official The Daily Star recently on condition of anonymity.

Documents show Dhaka-based buying house Asia Trading Corporation shipped 14,085 tonnes of clothing items worth Tk 308 crore (\$28 million) to the UAE, Singapore and Malaysia in 2022. However, not even a single dollar entered the country against this shipment.

In the shipping documents, the company showed all the 1,342 consignments as “sample goods”. Under customs rules, sample goods do not fetch any export earnings.

Similarly, Hong Kong Fashion, an export-oriented company based in Gazipur, exported 1,160 tonnes of RMG goods worth Tk 43.21 crore to seven countries including the UAE, Canada and Malaysia between January 2022 and May 2023. Only Tk 12.73 crore has been brought back to the country against these shipments, while the remaining Tk 30.48 crore was laundered, according to the customs probe report.

Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) came up with the findings after a six-month investigation carried out in three phases, beginning January this year. The CIID analysed the export data of these companies from January 2017 to May 2023.

Of the Tk 821 crore laundered, around Tk 600 crore went to the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Singapore. The rest was sent to 22 other countries, including Canada, Australia, Belgium, Qatar, Spain, Kuwait, the Philippines, Sweden, Russia, Panama, Thailand, Georgia and Palestine territory, according to documents obtained by The Daily Star.

“We have never before identified such a large-scale export forgery. In the past, we had information about money laundering involving 10 or 15 consignments. Irregularities involving so many consignments together never caught our attention,” said Mohammad Bashir Ahmed, additional director general of CIID, Chattogram office.

Most of the 33 exporters and buying houses whose names came up in the customs investigation are located in Dhaka and Gazipur.

The Daily Star spoke with seven of these companies, and each of them denied any wrongdoing.

Names of at least 12 commercial banks were used in the export documents. This newspaper spoke with six banks. Officials of three banks said the exporters in question are not their clients. Three other banks said they issued the letters of credit against the export permits of

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The Harihar river is occupied by influential people of Swarnpur village in Jashore's Manirampur upazila for fish farming. They have built small dams across the river and created their “own” ponds and lakes. A large part of the 45km river has already been taken over in Jhikargachha, Manirampur and Jashore Sadar upazilas. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

No more 3-day voice, data packs from Oct 15

BTRC orders telcos to discontinue 15-day plans too

MAHMUDUL HASAN

At a time when the government is pressing full steam ahead with the ‘Smart Bangladesh’ agenda, the telecom regulator is taking measures that are at odds with it.

On September 3, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission ordered the mobile operators to discontinue three-day and 15-day voice and data packages from October 15, in a move that stakeholders, experts and consumer rights organisations say restricts the freedom of choice.

The move will particularly hit the pockets of the grassroots, low-income and youth segments and is primed to reduce their consumption of telecom services, particularly the internet.

The operators have also been directed to limit the total number of packages they offer to 40. At present, operators offer up to 95 packages to subscribers, whose duration ranges from an hour to an indefinite period.

From October 15, mobile users will have the option to buy voice or data plans for seven days or 30 days. The option to purchase plans with unlimited validity will remain, too.

The BTRC said it arrived at the decision by surveying mobile users, who were in favour of condensing the volume of packages on offer.

The mobile operators maintain that the BTRC survey contained leading questions that influenced the respondents’ answers by suggesting responses.

Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar has long been expressing his annoyance over the sheer number of packages offered by the carriers.

“Earlier, they would offer 300 packages. Now they are offering 95

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BTRC CRACKS DOWN ON TELCOS' PACKAGES

Only 7-day and 30-day plans allowed

40pc subscribers opt for 3-day packages

Only 40 data packs can be offered after Oct 15



55KG GOLD THEFT

It may be an inside job

Say police officials probing the crime at Dhaka airport

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

The gold – 55.51kg to be precise – stolen from Dhaka Customs House was taken from 437 separate packs kept inside a customs warehouse at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The thieves didn’t take the entire contents from the packs; rather, they pilfered only small portions of gold from the packs before putting those back, according to investigators.

All these gold items were seized under the DM (detention memo) criteria, as these were supposed to be released upon payment of fines and taxes.

To distinguish one item from another, officials placed the DM items in separate packs and sealed them with tape. The gold was pilfered from 437 of those items, which were seized between 2020 and August of this year.

“It is not possible for a common person or a thief to enter such a secure place at the airport. Even then, if anyone enters, they will not take a portion of gold from a pack; they will take the whole batch,” said Morshed Alam, deputy commissioner of Uttara Division Police.

“We also found the instruments that were used to break the vault and cut the window,” he told The Daily Star.

Police seized a cutter, an axe, and a Chinese knife from the warehouse.

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the BUSINESS

Exports growing, but slowly

Earnings from merchandise shipments in August increased slightly by 3.80 percent to \$4.78 billion, mainly riding on apparel exports, as all the other major sectors staged a poor performance.

Three important sectors – leather and leather goods, jute and jute goods and home textiles – staged a poor performance.

This was largely due to the volatile global economic situation stemming from the fallouts of the pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war.

Although inflation is going down in the major export destinations like Europe and the US bank, interest rates are still high. As a result, consumers are yet to go on a spending spree as in the pre-pandemic period.

STORY ON B1



School students, along with their guardians and others, crossing the Uttara-Tongi flyover amid heavy traffic, obstructing vehicular movement while also throwing themselves in harm's way. Such disregard for road safety rules often leads to dire accidents. The photo was taken in the capital's Uttara yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Probe into S Alam's wealth abroad

JP's Chunnu asks PM in JS without mentioning his name

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Without mentioning S Alam's name, Jatiya Party Secretary General Mujibur Haque Chunnu yesterday urged the prime minister to take immediate steps to investigate the allegations that the businessman has built an empire of USD 1 billion in Singapore.

Speaking on a point of order in the Jatiya Sangsad, he mentioned a report The Daily Star ran on the businessman.

He said the person in question owns many banks, has taken citizenship of other countries, and purchased commercial property, hotels and businesses worth a billion dollars in Singapore.

On August 4, The Daily Star published the report, headlined “S Alam's Aladdin's Lamp”.

“Such a big incident ... many pieces of evidence have come to light that are hard not to believe, and we believe this is an important matter for the state,” said Chunnu.

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