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ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Govt sets up inquiry commission

It has to submit report in 45 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday formed a five-member inquiry commission to identify and find the people who were forcibly disappeared by various intelligence and law enforcement agencies between January 1, 2010, and August 5, 2024.

The formation of the commission comes three weeks after the toppling of the previous government, which had persistently denied reports of enforced disappearance and maintained that the victims went into hiding willingly to embarrass the authorities.

Bangladesh currently has no laws criminalising enforced disappearance nor has it ratified the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The country has now tasked retired High Court judge Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury to lead the new commission that will investigate the circumstances under which people were forcibly disappeared by any law enforcement or intelligence agency.

These agencies include Bangladesh Police, the Rapid

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Seven-year-old Riya feeding her 10-month-old brother the bread they received as relief for flood victims yesterday. Their family, along with 25 others, have been in an under-construction building in Feni municipality since Thursday when their previous shelter was flooded.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

UCB freed from ex-land minister, family's grip

2 more banks removed from S Alam's control

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The family of former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed lost its grip on United Commercial Bank (UCB) yesterday as the Bangladesh Bank dissolved the lender's board of directors.

The dissolved 18 member board was heavily dominated by Saifuzzaman's family members, including his sister Roxana Zaman Chaudhury and relatives Anisuzzaman Chowdhury and Asifuzzaman Chowdhury.

Saifuzzaman's wife, Rukhmila Zaman, had been serving as chairman of the bank till August 16, when the bank reconstituted the board of its own accord in an attempt to keep a portion of Saifuzzaman's family onboard, industry insiders alleged.

The bank reconstituted its board again yesterday for the same reason just hours before the banking regulator dissolved the board, they added.

Over the years, Saifuzzaman has influenced various activities at the bank,

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Major reshuffle in police force

3 top cops forced into retirement; 5 retired police officials reinstated

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

In a major reshuffle in the police force yesterday, three top police officials have been sent into forced retirement and five mid-ranking officials, who had been forced to retire by the Awami League government, have been reinstated.

Also, 24 district police superintendents were transferred to police units across the country.

The government also transferred 38 additional SP and 14 assistant superintendent of police (ASP) ranked officers from Dhaka Metropolitan Police to different police units, including in-service training centre, river police, and Rab.

Many of these officials have worked in the capital for years and had held major posts during the AL rule.

Forty-seven additional SP and 10 ASP ranked officers, who were outside Dhaka or in different units, have been transferred to the DMP.

Six deputy inspectors general and two additional inspectors general also got new posts.

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- 24 SPs transferred
- 38 addl SPs sent outside Dhaka, to police units
- 47 addl SPs transferred to Dhaka, police units

How a family grabbed multiple banks

S Alam and his family bypassed rules cleverly in capturing seven banks and two non-banks

AHSAN HABIB

The Bangladesh Bank is supposed to protect customers' interests, but it did not do so when it permitted Mohammed Saiful Alam and his family to seize multiple banks and funnel enormous sums as loans.

Alam, the chairman of S Alam Group, and his family members used the central bank's special permission to unprecedentedly possess large shares of seven banks and two financial institutions despite prohibition by the Bank Company Act.

For example, they have a 30 percent stake in Islami Bank while the law caps such shareholding by a family in a bank at 10 percent. That allowed Alam's relatives to take a total of Tk 25,000 crore loans from the bank with far less investment in it, official data shows. The actual amount is believed to be more than three

S ALAM, RELATIVES' SHARE IN BANKS, FIS (IN %)	
Islami Bank	30
SIBL	22
First Security	28
Global Islami	30
Al-Arafah	5
Union Bank	74
Northern Insurance	5
Aviva Finance	72

SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORTS

times the official figure.

The Alams are the only family in Bangladesh with all members and some of their relatives sitting on the boards of several banks simultaneously. They deftly captured the banks' shares as the central bank relaxed the rules for them.

Analysts and experts have condemned such a practice as "totally unacceptable and absurd", as it has put the banks, and the entire financial sector at risk.

The experts have been calling for efforts to reduce family control over the banks for a long time. However, their suggestion fell on deaf ears with the central bank bypassing rules to let Alam and his family strengthen their control over the banks.

All the members of the family were directors of different banks until last week when the

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FLOOD RELIEF

Lack of logistics key obstacle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inadequate logistics continue to plague relief distribution along the eastern flank of Bangladesh that has been ravaged by the recent flood. Although the government has allocated food relief and cash -- 20,650 tonnes of rice and Tk 3.52 crore -- many among the 5.6 million flood victims of 11 districts are yet to benefit from it.

While the flood situation has improved in the absence of torrential rains in the eastern districts and water levels are subsiding, local administration and volunteers still find it hard to reach remote areas since they do not have enough boats. As a result, there is a strong demand for relief materials in deep pockets. Some of the officials have also complained of inadequate allocation of relief materials.

According to a daily update of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Chattogram was allocated Tk 35 lakh and 2,100 tonnes of rice, Feni was allocated Tk 62 lakh and 2,900 tonnes of rice, Cumilla, Noakhali and Sylhet were each allocated with Tk 45 lakh and 2,600 tonnes rice, Moulvibazar with Tk 30 lakh and 2,350 tonnes of rice, Habiganj with Tk 35 lakh and 2,400 tonnes of rice, Brahmanbaria with Tk 15 lakh and 1,600 tonnes of rice, Lakkhipur and Khagrachhari with Tk 10 lakh and 500 tonnes of rice each, and Cox'sBazar with Tk 20 lakh and 500 tonnes of rice.

The disaster relief ministry also allocated 15,000 packs of dry food

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YUNUS' ADDRESS

It presented a clear vision of Bangladesh

Say eminent citizens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muhammad Yunus, the chief adviser to the interim government, has presented his vision with objectivity and assured his government's commitment towards the countrymen in his televised address to the nation, said eminent citizens.

The speech has met the expectations of the people, said Itekhazuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

"Without any verbosity or rhetoric, Yunus, as expected of him, provided straightforward responses to a whole range of issues that have been agitating the minds of the people in the prevailing extremely challenging circumstances."

The speech strongly emphasised equality for everyone irrespective of any marker of identity and fundamental rights and justice without any form of discrimination.

"One could easily find in the speech a true articulation of the underlying spirit and aspirations of 'New Bangladesh' as pronounced by the unprecedented student-led people's movement."

The emphasis against corruption

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Sweatshops and traders of kitchen markets have turned the Shuvadya canal into a landfill, leaving no room for water to flow. The photo was taken in Dakshin Keraniganj a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Modi's tweet and a question

TANIM AHMED

In his recent tweet, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that while talking to US President Joe Biden, they spoke about Ukraine, and "also discussed the situation in Bangladesh and stressed the need for early restoration of normalcy, and ensuring the safety and security of minorities, especially the Hindus, in Bangladesh".

Not just Prime Minister Modi, the Indian foreign ministry's brief states that the two leaders "expressed their shared concern" about the situation in Bangladesh.

The two leaders hoped that "safety and security of the minorities, particularly Hindus, in Bangladesh" would be ensured.

Curiously though, the White House readout of the same telephone conversation does not even mention Bangladesh, which probably indicates that Biden's concern about the "situation" in this country is not as much as Modi had thought it to be or what his foreign ministry's statement makes it out to be.

The Indian prime minister had already spoken to Muhammad Yunus, the de facto Bangladesh prime minister, soon after his inauguration, and chose to take up this issue with the American president. He might have, instead, raised it with his counterpart in Bangladesh again, if he was still unsure whether the matter was satisfactorily resolved.