

Take 'concrete action' to stop bloodshed

Asean leaders press Myanmar junta, its opponents

AFP, Vientiane

Southeast Asian leaders pressed Myanmar's junta and its opponents yesterday to take "concrete action" to stop the bloodshed in the country's civil war and sought to kick-start faltering diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis.

The 10 member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has tried to no avail to find a negotiated solution to the Myanmar crisis, which has killed thousands of people and forced millions to flee their homes since the military seized power in February 2021.

The crisis dominated the first day of the Asean summit in Vientiane. Asean leaders held their first face-to-face talks with a senior junta representative in more than three years on the first day.

The junta has suffered serious battlefield defeats over the past year during a renewed offensive by ethnic minority armed groups and pro-democracy "People's Defence Forces" that rose up to oppose its coup.



Two devotees praying to Goddess Durga at the Ramna Kali Temple on the sixth day of the Durga Puja festival (Shashthi) yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ACC finds Tk 56cr shady transactions thru 8 accounts of ex-home minister

DIPAN NANDY

There were suspicious transactions of around Tk 56 crore in eight bank accounts of former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, found an Anti-Corruption Commission probe.

He also acquired Tk 16 crore beyond his known sources of income from July 1997 to August 13, 2024, according to the first information report filed by the ACC's Integrated District Office-1 yesterday.

Jahangir Alam, deputy director (special investigation and inquiry-1) of the anti-graft body, lodged the case against Kamal.

Four more cases were filed against Kamal, his wife Lutful Tahmina Khan, son Shafi Modasser Khan, and daughter Shafia Tasnim Khan by the ACC on charges of abuse of power, corruption in recruitment, bribery, money laundering, and various other forms of graft. Kamal's personal assistant Monir Hossain was also named in the cases.

The case statement said Kamal acquired Tk 55.92 crore through

bribery and corruption and made suspicious bank transactions to conceal the sources of the money.

These offences are punishable under section 27(1) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004, and sections 4(2) and 4(3) of the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012.

Of the Tk 55.92 crore, Tk 48.8 crore was transacted via Janata Bank's Farmgate branch, Tk 1.52 crore, Tk 1 crore, and Tk 1 crore via three accounts at Union Bank's Bijoy Sarani branch, Tk 1 crore via Shimanto Bank's Corporate Head Office branch, Tk 1 crore via City Bank's Banani branch, Tk 1 crore via its Karwan Bazar branch, and Tk 60.11 lakh via its Gulshan Avenue branch, according to the statement of the case lodged against the former home minister.

The statement mentions that after the 2008 elections, Kamal acquired immovable assets worth Tk 2.57 crore, including a four-storey building in Monipuripara, 8.5 decimals of land in Mohakhali and Mirpur, 145

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Racing buses end the tale of two sisters

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Family members shared that Irene, a former student of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, joined the IT firm first and her elder sister soon followed in her footsteps.

"The two buses were racing for quite some time. They hit each other at least three times before one of the buses, whose registration number was Dhaka Metro Ba 130189, ran over the sisters," Anika Tabassum, a student and passenger of the other bus, told The Daily Star.

"The girl was killed due to the reckless driving of the buses. Irene was stuck under the wheels of one."

Anika too hurt her neck when the two buses struck each other during their race.

Fatema Siddika, sub-inspector of Badda Police Station, said the accident occurred due to the buses racing.

Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of the station, said both the buses were seized.

The driver and helper had fled immediately after the accident. But police later arrested driver Milton Hossain Mintu, 50, during a raid in Madhya Badda area in the afternoon, he said.

The process of filing a case was underway.

BNP to ensure justice if voted back to power

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unfortunate but true that the members of a particular political party, which claims to be the greatest saviour of the minority community, have been involved in all the incidents of repression that took place against them in the past.

"They [AL men] were also behind the incidents involving the occupation of land and property belonging to our community [Hindu] in Bangladesh. If our party forms the government in the future, each incident will be investigated impartially, and justice will be ensured."

At the beginning, Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad General Secretary and daily Kalbela Editor Santosh Sharma highlighted the eight-point demand of their community, calling for justice and exemplary punishment for the injustices and abuses suffered by the minorities.

Fakhrul said some foreign media are spreading propaganda against the communal harmony of Bangladesh with biased and false reports to undermine the political changeover following the fall of the Awami League amid an uprising. "I won't say nothing happened. Some of the incidents that happened were not communal in nature but political ones."

The BNP leader recounted how their party leaders and activists struggled for 15 years against the AL government, enduring repression, killings, enforced disappearances, and imprisonment in false cases.

He paid tribute to over 1,500 people who were martyred during the recent mass uprising and called upon the government to provide compensation for the martyrs and support for their families.

Fakhrul, on behalf of the BNP, and its Chairperson Khaleda Zia, and acting chairman Tarique Rahman, extended greetings to the Hindu community on the auspicious occasion of Durga Puja.

Up to Tk 50,835cr lost to graft in 15yrs

FROM PAGE 1

"People involved in corruption must be held accountable," TIB Executive Director Ittekkharuzzaman said at the press briefing.

A law combating conflict of interest breaches must be enacted to prevent nepotism, irregularities and corruption, he added.

Since no political parties are in power, examples must be set now, he said, adding that actions were not taken against the corrupt previously due political considerations.

It is against the TIB policy to name names publicly, but if the authority asks for identities of the corrupt, the TIB will comply, he said.

Contacted, RHD Chief Engineer Syed Moinul Hasan only said, "I have seen the [TIB] report."

At the press briefing, TIB Senior Research Fellow Muhammad Julkarnayeen and Research Associate Mostafa Kamal read out the findings.

The research titled "Governance Challenges in the Implementation of Roads and Highways Development Projects" was done on projects that were completed between 2017-18 and 2021-22 fiscal years. However, the projects were initiated between 2010-11 and 2018-19 fiscal years.

The projects that the TIB studied were implemented with domestic funds and each cost less than Tk 1,000 crore.

Based on the data, the researchers made an estimation of all development projects implemented with domestic and foreign funds between 2009-10 and 2023-24.

Asked about the matter, Julkarnayeen said the picture of corruption is almost the same in foreign- and local-funded projects.

Bribery or corruption has taken an institutional shape in this sector, he said.

Asked whether there were shortcomings on the part of the Asian Development Bank, Jica, and World Bank, Ittekkharuzzaman said the lenders "cannot avoid responsibility. The goings-on were not unknown to them."

The researchers took 73 key informant interviews and held 13 group discussions between July 2023 and September 2024.

As per the findings, firms pay a bribe of 5-6 percent of the total work order value to secure a contract.

This bribe money is distributed among members of the procurement committee, tender opening and evaluation committee, and officials and employees of the RHD and Road Transport and Highways Division. Each gets a cut ranging from 0.5 percent to 3 percent.

During inspection of the project site and payment, a contractor pays 6-8 percent of the total work order to officials. The project director, other officials and employees get a cut ranging from 0.15 to 1.5 percent.

The amount of bribery in construction-related work orders is estimated to be between 11 and 14 percent. Between 2009-10 and 2023-24,

For example, Tk 74 lakh was allocated in a project for planting trees. But not a single tree was planted.

The typical lifespan of a road is considered 20 years. But the projects completed in the last one to five years under this study show a need for repairs.

Another 2 to 6 percent of the total project value is lost due to renting of licences by established contractors and purchasing of work orders from contractors by third parties in an improper process and other irregularities.

The overall corruption in the construction work is 23 to 40 percent.

Researcher Mostafa Kamal said the total development expenditure from the Annual Development Programme for the RHD between FY 2009-10 and 2023-24 was Tk 1,69,449.93 crore.

Of the sum, 75 percent was spent on construction of roads and bridges and 25 percent on land acquisition, utility lines moving and operational costs, he said, citing 48 projects.

The total estimated construction related expenditure is Tk 1,27,087 crore. And given the overall corruption rate in road construction related work, Tk 29,230 crore to Tk 50,835 crore was lost in corruption from 2009-10 to 2023-24.

OTHER FINDINGS
The research says the requirements for contractors are often set in a way that only a few specific firms can meet them.

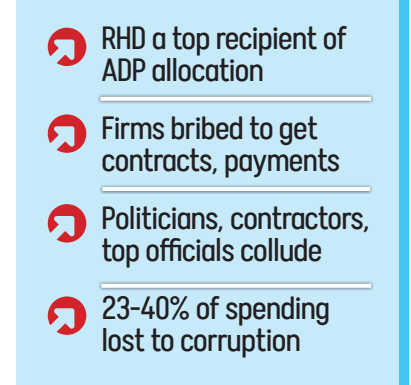
In some cases, the contractors' experience is inflated through fraud and secret bidding data is leaked out to favour a particular firm.

Political leaders and senior officials sometimes ask firms with potentials to bid for certain contracts, further manipulating the process.

From the fiscal year 2013-14 to 2023-24, 15 major firms established dominance through collusion. These firms won roads and bridges construction contracts worth Tk 57,000 crore through the e-Government Procurement process.

The research also found a lack of accountability in project implementation; irregularities and corruption in project prioritisation, project proposal evaluation and appointment of project directors.

TIB recommended amending the guideline for formulating development projects and making all project related information public.



an estimated Tk 13,980 Tk17,792 crore was paid in bribes.

Firms engage in corruption reaching up to 20 percent of the contract value. Thus, the amount ranged from Tk 12,709 to Tk 25,417 crore between FY 2009-10 and 2023-24.

The contractors give a cut to the minister concerned, several MPs, politicians, and top officials, said the report.

The use of standard and less-than-specified amounts of materials is all too common and the project directors and engineers allow it to happen.

They often use lower density stones, inferior quality or reduced amounts of bitumen, and skimp on tack coat bitumen.

Even when there are allocations, the contractors do not plant trees, install traffic signs, or spend on maintenance and earthworks.

Over 92,000 accused, 1,474 cases, 51 days

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Enamul Haque Sagor, assistant inspector general (media) at the PHQ, said that the increase in arrests is due to police operations returning to full capacity.

"After August 5, we encountered significant challenges, with around 407 police establishments and some 1,000 police vehicles damaged or destroyed. We had to rent vehicles for our operations."

Enamul said that changes were made in unit chiefs, with new superintendents of police (SP) and commissioners posted to districts and metropolitan areas.

"Initially, they [SPs, commissioners] focused on boosting the morale of the force members. Now, we have resumed our operational activities," he told The Daily Star.

During the previous Awami League regime, the average daily arrest count nationwide ranged from 500 to 600 people for different offences. In comparison, approximately 1,000 arrests were made each day on average in the first week of this month.

Asked about the increase in arrests, AIG Enamul said, "A significant number of the cases were filed after August 5, and we were unable to carry out many arrest warrants. However, we are now fulfilling those warrants as part of our regular operations."

CASES AGAINST EX-MINISTERS, MPs
According to sources at the PHQ, a total of 1,174 cases have been filed against 390 former ministers, MPs, advisers to the prime minister, and city corporation mayors from August 6 to September 25.

Among the accused, 59 individuals, including former ministers, state ministers, and advisers to Hasina, have already been arrested.

The former premier herself is facing

the highest 220 cases. Her sister, Sheikh Rehana, is implicated in 22 cases, son Sajeeb Wazed Joy in 19, daughter Saima Wazed Putul in four, and nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby in one, according to PHQ data.

Among former cabinet members, home minister Asaduzzaman Khan is facing the second-highest total of 199 cases, followed by road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader with 169, foreign minister Hasan Mahmud with 72, and law minister Anisul Huq with 59.

AL presidium member Jahangir Kabir Nanak has been accused in 41 cases, while former adviser on private industry and investment Salman F Rahman faces 24.

Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, the former mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation, is facing 38 lawsuits, and former Dhaka North City Corporation mayor Md Atiqul Islam has 20 against him.

Other notable figures facing lawsuits include Mohammad A Aralat, former state minister for information and broadcasting, with 54 cases; Zunaid Ahmed Palak, former state minister for posts, telecommunications, and IT with 44; and AKM Shamim Osman, former Narayanganj-4 lawmaker, with 41.

Chhatra League President Saddam Hossain and Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Inan have been implicated in 31 and 30 cases respectively. Shahriar Kabir, former president of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, has been accused in nine cases.

Additionally, around 300 cases have been filed against 449 current and former police officials. Of them, 17 individuals, including two former inspectors general of police, have been arrested so far.

Of the lawsuits, 136 were filed

Kazi brothers' capital abroad without BB nod

FROM PAGE 1

five MPs with the highest amount of loans, according to a Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) analysis. He mentioned Tk 24 crore investment in business shares.

The financial statements of the £2.7 million (Tk 39.5 crore) British firm Teatulia UK Ltd were submitted to the ACC recently, and The Daily Star collected a copy of the documents.

The UK company is an offshoot of a bigger company - Teatulia - based out of Delaware, the US state known as a tax haven because of its lenient taxation system.

With its office in Denver, Colorado, the Teatulia imports and markets tea from Bangladesh. It was formed on November 29, 2007, by Nabil, Anis and Inam. A US citizen named Linda Appel Lipsius was added in 2010, company documents show.

The three brothers invested more than \$18 million (Tk 215 crore) in the company up until November 2020, according to company documents.

The total worth of their foreign investment in Teatulia concerns in the US and the UK amounts to approximately Tk 254.5 crore.

However, strict capital controls in Bangladesh fully restrict who can transfer money abroad, where, and how much.

"My clients were actually investors in Teatulia (UK). That was where all the money came from," N Hamilton, the lawyer for Nabil, Anis and Inam, told the court.

Hamilton did not disclose where his clients got the money to invest in the company.

Teatulia UK's financial statements submitted to the ACC show that the investments came from Dubai-based Double Core General Trading LLC and Aramex International, and Singapore-based Global Biz Import Export Pte Ltd. A total of 10 transactions from 2020 to 2022 were marked out by The Daily Star.

The Teatulia UK's liquidation report, after it ceased operations in 2023, called Double Core an investor, which is owned by Anis, Canadian citizen Mohammed Sohail Hana and an Emirati named Abdulla Hassan Ali, records from the UAE National Economic Register and a copy of the commercial licence of the company show. It is located in a residential neighbourhood called Deira Al Murar.

Anis holds controlling shares at the firm.

The Singapore-based Global Biz Import Export is a Bangladesh-owned clearing house or commission agent, according to documents from Singapore's Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority.

The firm is wholly owned by a Bangladeshi citizen named Sheikh Mohammad Wahiduzzaman Ripon, whose address is in Dhaka's Malibagh.

The Teatulia UK's liquidation report shows that the company only made a profit in 2020, and that too, only £25,247.

Before it began business, the organisation spent £500,000 on refurbishments alone.

BRAND FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

The tea comes from Gemcon Group's Teatulia organic tea plantation in the northwest of the country. A report published in The Daily Star back on May 9, 2012, narrates how Teatulia transformed barren land into an

organic agricultural haven.

"Teatulia's success was laudable, but its next challenge was to sell the tea outside of Bangladesh," the report said. "In 2009, with American co-founder and CEO Linda Appel Lipsius, the tea for the American market was christened Teatulia, after its homeland. Lipsius helped to arrange the organic packaging from top to bottom, including corn silk bags and water-based ink for the packaging."

Forbes ran a story about Teatulia in April 2019, calling it a "brand with a purpose".

The UK counterpart of the company was incorporated on August 22, 2017, and started trading on September 27, 2018, with Nabil and his brothers as the only investors, according to court documents.

Their British business partner Ahsan Akbar was a director.

The business involved a tea cafe at 36 Neal Street in London's Covent Garden. The business's liquidation report, submitted to the ACC, states that it was also an event space for film screenings, author events, and private parties, along with a tea wholesale point.

The London venture was about marketing the uniqueness of Bangladeshi tea, court documents show.

While hearing the case on whether to grant Nabil and his brothers an injunction against their business partner, UK High Court judge Justice Sir Robert Jay told their lawyers that there is information that "might have the tendency to embarrass your clients because it puts them in a poor light in relation to Bangladeshi money laundering regulations".

Chloe Strong, the lawyer for the British business partner Ahsan, argued that there is a "ban on Bangladeshi nationals possessing foreign companies unless they get approval from the central bank" and that "essentially it can amount to a breach of money laundering regulations in Bangladesh by doing so without the relevant approval".

Nabil's lawyer Hamilton denied claims that Bangladeshi money laundering laws were flouted, while insisting that they were the only investors.

Justice Jay denied Nabil and his brothers the injunction. However, they appealed the decision and got the injunction on July 22.

While Nabil and Inam did not respond to The Daily Star's queries, their lawyer Ivon J Sampson told this correspondent that they do not wish to talk to the reporter because a response "would defeat the whole object of them obtaining the injunction in the first place which is to prevent the publication of private and commercial information about them".

Responding to The Daily Star's questions, Kazi Anis said, "We categorically deny any wrongdoing. The international bond of our tea was built with investments from abroad. Ideally, good Bangladeshi businesses and brands should be able to expand into international markets ..."

"For us, creating a brand like Teatulia, and other initiatives like sponsorship of Dhaka Lit Fest, was all about showcasing Bangladesh to the world in a positive light ..." he added.