

## FREEZING OF ASSETS S Alam threatens int’l legal action against govt: FT

STAR REPORT

S Alam Group owner Mohammed Saiful Alam has initiated a legal effort as a Singaporean citizen to recover financial losses he claims were caused by the Bangladeshi government freezing his assets and harming his investments, The Financial Times reports.

The dispute stems from actions taken by the interim government following the ousting of prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Alam says his family’s bank accounts were frozen, they were subjected to travel bans, and they lost control of their companies, all while facing investigations for alleged money laundering without formal notification.

S Alam has sent a “notice of dispute” to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and key advisers, warning that if the matter is unresolved within six months, he will pursue international arbitration under a 2004 bilateral investment treaty between Bangladesh and Singapore.

The December 18 notice states that the family obtained permanent residence in Singapore in 2011 and citizenship between 2021 and 2023. It adds that they all renounced their Bangladeshi nationality in 2020.

The notice was sent by lawyers of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, an American law firm, according to the FT report.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

As Dhaka remains consistently at the top of the list of cities with the most hazardous air, the AQI yesterday too was 114, meaning it was still unhealthy to breathe in. The photo was taken at the smog-filled Naya Bazar Road in the capital yesterday morning.

## Non-lethal weapons

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the commission’s work, particularly its focus on recommending the use of non-lethal weapons to prevent tragedies like those during the July uprising. “Our ultimate goal is to ensure that no life is lost, even in small scale incidents,” he said.

Acknowledging the deep-rooted problem of political influence on law enforcement agencies, Safar Raj, a retired secretary, said that when a political government comes to power, it tends to consolidate control over all institutions, including the police.

“The issue is complex and wide. You cannot just pull out police from this,” he said.

“There will be recommendations on the entire matter, which I cannot summarise in a single word,” he said when asked if their report would include suggestions to free the police from political influence.

During its 15-year rule, the previous AL government used law enforcement as a tool to suppress opposition and dissent. Some police officers acted as party loyalists, securing lucrative postings and engaging in corruption, sidelining competent officers. During the July-August protests, police indiscriminately used lethal weapons, causing massive casualties.

The chief of the Police Reform Commission stressed the importance of reducing corruption and ensuring accountability through exemplary

punishments for offenders. “If law enforcers face tough consequences for wrongdoing, others will refrain from engaging in similar misconduct.”

He also highlighted the role of civil society and the general public in holding officials accountable, drawing comparisons with practices in advanced democracies.

Safar Raj said the commission would recommend the use of force in line with UN guidelines and the standards of European countries, which employ modern technologies for crowd control to prevent loss of life, even if injuries occur.

Noting that police officers deployed to UN missions receive training in non-lethal techniques, he hoped that similar training could be organised for all officers gradually.

The commission’s report will propose guidelines following High Court Division and Appellate Division directives regarding arrests without warrants under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the treatment of individuals on remand under Section 167 of the CrPC.

These directives include: police officers must disclose their identity and present ID cards after arresting the suspects; reasons for arrests must be recorded in a register; relatives of the arrestee must be informed within an hour; detainees should have access to a lawyer or relatives; no torture of the arrestees during interrogation

on remand; interrogations during remand must occur in a designated room with a transparent glass wall, where a lawyer or relative can observe the proceedings.

The commission chief said amendments to existing laws of 1898 may be necessary, a responsibility that would fall to the law ministry.

On the demand for operations of police under a commission, he said a proposal for such a commission has been pending since 2007 as laws were not enacted in this regard during the then caretaker government and the past 15 years of political government.

“We are making recommendations, but there needs to be political will to implement those,” he said, mentioning that parliament is not functional now, so an ordinance can be promulgated to implement their recommendations.

He said they have received a proposal from the inspector general of police that suggests a commission like that of Sri Lanka, where the National Police Commission is vested with wide powers pertaining to the appointment, promotion, transfers, disciplinary control and dismissal of police commissioners.

Replying to another query about public complaints against police, he said it was a very important issue and that the reform commission would bring this up in its report so that the complaints against police officers could be addressed properly.

## People will have to take to streets for voting rights

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to protect it. If needed, we have to fight once more for the country and the people. Let us unite in the days ahead.”

Fakhrul also criticised a section of people for creating confusion through their statements.

“Some people, especially those who are in responsible positions, are making misleading and provocative statements. Stop confusing people. Enough is enough, we suffered greatly and shed our blood.”

About the national polls, the BNP leader said, “We want to hold a peaceful election where people can cast their votes freely and elect their candidates as per their choice. And those elected will bring changes in the governance system.”

The BNP does not want to take revenge, said Fakhrul, adding that it wants to build a new Bangladesh with all.

Mentioning 15 years of party’s struggle, the BNP secretary general said its leaders and activists were subjected to immense oppression, and false cases were filed against them.

“Even now, our party activists have to appear before the court. But many try to say that the BNP cannot do anything. But the situation [after August 5] has arisen because of our 15 years of struggle.”

Regarding the reforms, Fakhrul said discussions are being held in this connection. “Do you understand what reform means? I don’t understand. But I only understand that reform means some changes.”

“What does change mean? It has to be ensured that I can cast my vote, and people’s issues are discussed in parliament.”

In another development, the BNP yesterday held meetings with leaders of Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM) and Gono Odhikar Parishad (Faruk-Jaman faction) at the party chairperson’s office in Gulshan.

The meetings focused on the current political situation, elections, and reforms, according to the BNP.

Leaders of the three parties said the chief adviser should discuss with political parties before announcing the election.

“We were not aware of the indication of election time made by the chief adviser. This was not discussed with any of us,” said Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, BNP standing committee member, while briefing reporters after the meeting.

“We are unaware of the reason behind the extended timeframe for the election. We don’t find any justification for it.”

Highlighting the importance of timely polls, Khasru said, “The BNP believes that the people of Bangladesh are eagerly awaiting the upcoming election, which is important.”

NDM Chairman Bobby Hajjaj said, “We want to see the election held within a logical time. We expect a clear roadmap from the interim government.

“There is no need for delays regarding the election. No government can make significant decisions without the people’s mandate. It’s not just about the election date but also about the time needed to complete the essential tasks,” he added.

Faruk Hasan, acting member secretary of Gono Odhikar Parishad, said the timeframe given by the chief adviser is unclear.

## Russian forces capture another village in eastern Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said it had captured the village of Storozheve in eastern Ukraine, near the town of Velyka Novosilka which its troops is apparently trying to encircle.

“As a result of decisive action by troop units... the settlement of Storozhevoye has been liberated,” the defence ministry said in a statement, using the Russian name of the village.

Russia has been advancing steadily in the Donetsk region where Storozheve is located, against outgunned and outmaned Ukrainian forces.

Storozheve and Velyka Novosilka are close to the southern front line, which has remained largely static but where Ukraine says Russia is planning a fresh offensive.

## Nine killed in Iran as bus, fuel truck collide

AFP, Tehran

At least nine people were killed yesterday when a bus collided with a fuel truck in Iran’s southeast, state media reported, the second mass casualty road accident within days.

Mohammad Mehdi Sajjadi, head of the Red Crescent Society in Sistan-Baluchestan province, told the official IRNA news agency that “nine people lost their lives and 13 others were injured in the accident in which a bus collided with a fuel truck near Zahedan”.

On Saturday, 10 people were killed when a bus plunged into a ravine in Iran’s western Lorestan province.

## For the poor, inflation means

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to media reports. Fahmida expressed optimism that Bangladesh could achieve similar results, though not without sustained effort.

“To address inflation in the current context, the focus must be on improving supply chains and increasing the availability of products in the market,” she said.

Fahmida also emphasised the importance of expanding open market sales of essential goods and broadening social safety net programmes to alleviate the burden on vulnerable populations. “These measures are crucial to mitigating the impact of rising prices on millions of households,” she said.

A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies reveals a striking shift in dietary patterns in rural areas amid rising food costs. The daily average rice consumption per person climbed to 412 grams in 2023, up from 349 grams in 2022.

In stark contrast, the consumption of protein-rich foods like mutton and beef has plummeted. The study found that daily average consumption per person dropped to just 0.28 grams of mutton and 4.02 grams of beef, down sharply from 1.23 grams and 10.25 grams, respectively, the previous year. These changes reflect the difficult trade-offs many households make to cope with inflationary pressures.

Inflation remained persistently high in recent years under Sheikh Hasina’s government, a trend worsened by supply chain disruptions. These disruptions were fuelled by social and political unrest leading up to the August transition in the political regime, further intensifying the economic strain on households.

In Dhaka, fruit vendor Nur Islam Sheikh sees a similar trend. Apples that sold for Tk 180 per kg a year earlier now cost Tk 300, and customers who bought three kilograms now haggle for two.

Outside the capital, the situation is grimmer. Samiul Islam, a 40-year-old microbus driver in Dinaipur, earns a stagnant monthly income of Tk 15,000. Rising food prices have altered the family’s equation, forcing them to cut down on meals and essentials.

“Sometimes, I skip meals so that my children don’t go hungry,” Samiul says. In Kushtia, Babul Kumar Acharjee, a battery-run auto-rickshaw driver, echoes this sentiment. His family now lives on rice, vegetables and daal, with meat a distant memory.

Mehedi Hasan, a welding mechanic in Shimulia, a village in Kushtia, struggles with frequent borrowing for daily needs. “Amid the struggle, I now have to ask for money from my relatives even for smaller needs,” he said.

Liton Ghosh, who runs a modest roadside eatery in Dhaka’s Tejguri Bazar, is a quiet reflection of how small businesses are adapting to rising costs. His words, like his meals, echo the struggles of the poor recalibrating to survive.

Liton recalls a time not so long ago when he could serve three parathas with vegetables for Tk 39. Today, the same plate costs Tk 50 – but with smaller portions. “The parathas are a bit smaller now, and the portion of vegetables has also been reduced.”

[Our Dinaipur Correspondent Kongkon Karmakar and Kushtia Correspondent Anis Mondol contributed to this report.]

## 7 stabbed to death

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the vessel around 3:00pm and recovered five bodies from crew quarters, said Superintendent of Chandpur River Police Md Mushfiqur Rahman.

“The assailants attacked the victims with sharp weapons and left ... They did not take anything,” he told The Daily Star over the phone, adding that the attack was probably carried out early yesterday.

Three critically injured individuals were also rescued, but two of them died at the Chandpur 250-Bed General Hospital.

Lone survivor Jewel Rana, 23, of Faridpur, was transferred to Dhaka for better medical care.

Jewel’s throat was slit. Police tried to talk to him, but he could not talk. He could only write his name and a mobile phone number on a piece of paper before he was rushed to Dhaka in an ambulance.

Upon reaching Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 8:00pm, Jewel underwent a surgery and an artificial breathing tube was inserted in this throat, reports our DMCH correspondent.

Doctor Siraj Salek said Jewel lost a lot of blood and his treatment and recovery would take time.

Among the dead are MV Al-Bakhera master Kibria, 60, engine operator Salauddin, 55, helmsman Aminul Munsil, 40, and crew members Sajibul, 35, Azizul, 40, and Majedul Islam.

Doctor Md Anisur Rahman, a resident at the Chandpur 250-Bed General Hospital, said all the victims were stabbed and all but one died of blood loss.

Mahbub Morshed Diplu, a partner of the ship’s owning firm Bristy Enterprise, said MV Al-Bakhera, manned by eight crew members, had loaded 720 tonnes of urea fertiliser

from the KAFCO jetty on the southern bank of the Karnaphuli on Saturday night and set sail for Baghabari in Sirajganj on Sunday morning.

He told The Daily Star that they last spoke to engine operator Salahuddin around 8:30pm on Sunday. He said Salahuddin told them that MV Al-Bakhera was in a convoy of 40 to 50 vessels.

Diplu said there was nothing unusual about the phone conversation.

“When we tried to contact the vessel yesterday morning, no one responded,” Diplu told The Daily Star. They later asked a nearby vessel, MV Mugni-3, to have their crew members go to MV Al-Bakhera and see what was wrong.

The crew members of MV Mugni-3 discovered the bodies and the wounded in the afternoon and called 999, he added.

Nazmul Hossain Rubel, manager (operation) of MV Al-Bakhera’s local agent SS Shippers and Traders, said they usually call the master of the vessel at 10:00am every morning when the ship is in passage. Failing to contact the master, they informed the owner.

After visiting the scene, Additional Superintendent of Police of Chandpur Sudipto Roy in the evening said they were not considering it as a case of robbery. It appears to be a premeditated murder, he said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Industries has expressed condolences to the families of the crew members.

It also formed a probe committee. In a statement, it said the 4-member committee led by an additional secretary of the ministry was instructed to submit a report within the next five working days clearly mentioning the motive, the extent of damage and liability, and how to prevent such incidents in future.

## 3 teens killed in bike crash

They were returning home after attending a wedding ceremony

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Three teenage boys lost their lives early yesterday when the motorcycle carrying them collided with a roadside electric pole in Cumilla’s Sadar upazila when they were returning home after attending a wedding ceremony.

The victims were identified as Ahad Hossain, 14, son of Md Khalil; Emon Hossain, 16, son of Monir Hossain; and Emon Hossain, 15, son of Zakir Hossain, said Mohinul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Model Police Station.

According to police and local sources, the incident took place around 1:00am in the Araiara area.

On information, the police recovered the bodies following the accident, said the OC.

The bodies have been handed over to their families after the police completed necessary legal formalities.

## Panama rejects Trump’s threat to take control of Canal

AFP, Panama City

Panama’s President Jose Raul Mulino on Sunday dismissed recent threats made by US President-elect Donald Trump to retake control of the Panama Canal over complaints of “unfair” treatment of American ships.

“Every square meter of the Panama Canal and its adjacent areas belongs to Panama and will continue belonging to Panama,” Mulino said in a video posted to X.

Mulino’s public comments, though never mentioning Trump by name, come a day after the president-elect complained about the canal on his Truth Social platform.

“Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous,” he said.

Trump also complained of China’s growing influence around the canal, a worrying trend for American interests as US businesses depend on the channel to move goods between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

“It was solely for Panama to manage, not China, or anyone else,” Trump said. “We would and will NEVER let it fall into the wrong hands!”

The Panama Canal, which was completed by the United States in 1914, was returned to the Central American country under a 1977 deal signed by Democratic president Jimmy Carter.

Panama took full control in 1999.

Trump said that if Panama could not ensure “the secure, efficient and reliable operation” of the channel, “then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question.”

## Dhaka asks Delhi to send back Hasina

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and crimes against humanity over the killings during the July uprising that resulted in her ouster on August 5.

India and Bangladesh signed a treaty in 2013 regarding extradition. The treaty was amended in 2016.

The treaty states, “Extradition may be refused if the offence for which it is requested is an offence of a political character.” Another ground for refusal of extradition is if the charges being pressed have not been “made in good faith, in the interest of justice”.

It, however, says certain offences, like murder, “shall not be regarded as offences of a political character” for the purposes of the treaty.

The relations between India and Bangladesh came under strain since the interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus assumed power following Hasina’s ouster and flight to Delhi.

India has repeatedly expressed concerns over attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Dhaka dismissed Indian media reports on the attacks as “exaggerated”.

Earlier, on October 17, a three-member International Crimes Tribunal bench led by its Chairman Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mazumdar issued arrest warrants for 46 people, including Hasina and former minister Obaidul Quader, in separate cases.

ICT Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam had earlier said they would seek to bring back Hasina in time to stand trial.