

2 rejoinders, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

The report mentions that I have an office space in the Silicon Information Technology Tower in Dubai, valued at approximately Tk 1.3 crore. In reality, the company I have in Dubai has been declared in my tax returns during the previous government's tenure. I have not concealed any information about my business.

We stand by our report.

Orion Group's rejoinder

"On January 7, 2025, The Daily Star published a report titled "Parking wealth under the Dubai sun." It has come to my attention that the report contains false and fabricated information regarding Mohammad Obaidul Karim, Chairman of Orion Group.

Below are my clarifications, which I believe will address the baseless allegations made in the report about a respected businessman in Bangladesh. I request that The Daily Star publish this as a formal rejoinder to set the record straight. (Numbering of the following paragraphs is ours)

1. Regarding having property worth BDT 66.60 Crore in UAE

The news regarding having property worth BDT 66.60 Crore in UAE by Mohammad Obaidul Karim and family is completely false, baseless and without any source mentioned to substantiate it. In this regard, I am mentioning below the actual facts which will clarify the issue that I have no investment outside Bangladesh. Moreover, I want to emphasize that as it was not permitted by the Government of Bangladesh to invest any amount, we did not invest any money from Bangladesh. So, if inquired properly, it can be guaranteed that no such amount can be found in my name or in the name of family members that the money was taken out from Bangladesh.

2. Regarding Agri Products Europe in Albania

Having known ORION's long and diversified business track records

in Bangladesh, the then President of Albania offered me to invest in Albania for developing an industry in their country. In this connection, Agri Products Europe was established in Albania in 2013 and he also offered me industrial plots to establish this project. To facilitate this and to ensure my frequent visit to Albania for overseeing the development of the project, the then president of Albania issued me a Albanian passport as a token of our strong relationship. The issuance of Albanian passport was also duly declared in the Ministry of Home Affairs in Bangladesh.

Later on, as per Bangladesh Government's rules and regulations, as any Bangladeshi citizen were not allowed to invest outside the country, I did not make any investment there. As a result, the allotted land for the project was cancelled by the land department of Albania. Also, my passport was not renewed after expiry as I could not invest any money in their country.

3. Regarding Orion Pharma Bahrain

Orion Pharma Bahrain was incorporated on January 6, 2015, with the objective of setting up the facility for manufacturing pharmaceutical products mainly food supplements and nutraceutical products. This was also an initiative from the Bahrain Government who wanted to develop the pharmaceutical sector in their country as at that time there was no pharmaceutical plant in Bahrain. The Government of Bahrain was outsourcing pharmaceutical products from experienced manufacturers of other countries. At that time, we got qualified for having expertise in this sector. As part of developing Pharmaceutical Industry, Bahrain Government was arranging up to 70% to 80% financing. So, Industry developers had to inject 20% to 30% equity.

Afterwards, the Government of Bahrain also allotted land for

developing a pharmaceutical plant for manufacturing food supplements and nutraceutical products.

However, as we have always been in compliance with Bangladesh Government's rules and regulations, but we could not get the approval from Bangladesh Government to invest outside our country. Consequently, the project was cancelled by Bahrain Government.

4. Regarding Property in UAE

First of all, we would like to mention here that, the name of the hotel is Reflections Hotel LLC instead of the Palette Royal Reflections Hotel and Spa.

Already I have discussed with the concerned person of The Daily Star that, ORION or Mohammad Obaidul Karim is not the owner of the hotel even not 1%. I described very clearly to the concerned person of your newspaper that my responsibility was only to operate the hotel as Lessee. So, whatever I have described, is the reality. So, it is not clear mentioned in the newspaper that, whatever I have described, is the reality. So, it is not clear to me why again they published in their newspaper after knowing everything. It is very clear that they have only published the news to defame my name. I have such confidence that, any national or international agency can check and find out the real facts which will match with my statements.

5. Regarding the ownership of 3 apartments in Dubai

Regarding the ownership of 3 apartments in Dubai, which values are shown in the newspaper as BDT 66.59 Crore of which up to 65% was financed by the local bank of UAE and the remaining portion was financed by us as our equity which we provided from the income of our Hotel operation of (Reflections Hotel LLC).

Again, I am giving guarantee that, from Bangladesh me myself or any family member did not invest any

money outside Bangladesh for which I am ready to face any kind of inquiry.

6. Regarding Zeysha General Trading LLC

This Company was formed only for getting UAE Visa easily. It is confirmed and guaranteed that, there was no business activities in the name of this Company and even there is no bank account. This is also for your information that, the Company is already closed as we did not renew the license.

Paragraph 6 sheds light how they set up a company only for the purpose of obtaining UAE visas.

7. Regarding Indian Citizenship/Nationality

Regarding the Indian citizenship/nationality issue, I would like to strongly mention that, it is completely a false and misleading information as I never had any passport from India. So, there is no question of holding Indian Citizenship/nationality. You already know that, it was not possible and still it is not possible to get any citizenship from India by Bangladeshi Nationals.

8. Conviction

Regarding conviction by a kangaroo court in 2008, your report produced partial and misleading information saying "Obaidul was sentenced to 13 years in jail for amassing illegal wealth and hiding asset information."

Your report failed to mention the fact that all the cases filed against me during the emergency regime have been quashed by the apex court a decade ago.

In this light, we request that you publish the above statements clarifying the truth."

Our reply

Paragraph 1: The contention that we did not mention any source in our report is untrue. We cited specific official documents for each of the properties listed in his and his family's name. We also clearly mentioned how we estimated the values of those

properties – from official documents or readily available average market prices in the specific locality. Also, we did not mention or even indicate that any of these properties are fruits of any financial misconduct or money laundering from Bangladesh. On the contrary, we clearly stated, twice in our story, that we have seen no evidence of money laundering from Bangladesh.

Paragraph 2: This paragraph confirms his Albanian passport and the establishment of the company called Agri Products Europe in Albania, which we reported in our original story citing official documents.

Paragraph 3: Again, it confirms what we have reported – the launch and closure of Orion Pharma Bahrain.

Paragraph 4: As for his contention about Reflections Hotel LLC, we published his comments in our story in full, where he denied owning it and insisted that he is a lessee. Post-publication, we also received the agreement papers from the Group where he is listed as a lessee. However, official documents in our possession list him as a "partner", not a lessee, holding 49 percent stake.

Paragraph 5: This paragraph reaffirms our findings that he and his family own three residential properties in Dubai.

Paragraph 6: In our original report, we did not claim he has an Indian passport. We simply reported that he is "listed as an Indian" in Bahrain's documents. Also, in our original report, we used his version where he denied that he has Indian citizenship.

Paragraph 7: As for his acquittal after conviction in a graft case, we learned about the acquittal from the rejoinder, and have updated our online version accordingly.

Overall, the rejoinder acknowledges his and his family's links with the properties listed in our story. We stand by our report.

Govt moves to build road

FROM PAGE 12

So, we've decided to construct another road connecting Phoenix Road and Abdul Gani Road," he explained.

An earlier attempt to implement this project failed due to resistance from the then Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, he said.

However, he claimed DSCC has already given its approval this time.

The development comes at a time when the DSCC has been without an administrator for over a month. The post of chief executive officer has also remained vacant for since December last year.

At present, DSCC Secretary Mohammad Bashirul Haque Bhuiyan is serving as acting CEO and has been given financial and administrative authority to oversee routine operations in the absence of an administrator.

Contacted, he said the decision was taken by the ministry, and DSCC was not aware of the details. Meanwhile, Project Director Kayrul Baker did not respond to repeated phone calls for comment.

A DSCC official claimed that 92 percent of the park's modernisation work has already been completed.

The Daily Star called and sent messages to the senior secretary of the public administration ministry for a comment regarding the project

multiple times, but he did not respond.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Urban planners and environmentalists have condemned the decision, saying it will have devastating consequences.

"This is a terrible decision," said Adil Mohammad Khan, president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP).

"Destroying parks and playgrounds to accommodate private cars is unacceptable. If this road is built, it will cause irreversible damage to the park's environment. The government must halt this initiative immediately, and those responsible [in approving it] should be held accountable."

Former BIP president Mohammad Fazle Reza Sumon said, "When we don't even have one square metre of park space per person, where at least nine square metres are required, such a move will only make things worse for city residents."

"Out of Dhaka's 265 parks, only 42 remain. If the government doesn't protect them, what will we tell future generations?"

The World Health Organization advocates for nine square metres of open space per person within a 15-minute walking distance from home.

Amirul Rajiv, coordinator of the Tree Protection Movement, said every park and playground in the city is in a deplorable state.

About the long-standing battle

to protect Osmani Udyan, he said that despite a three-decade-long movement in this regard, no tangible progress has been made.

"There is no model udyan [garden or park] in Dhaka city.... If this move goes forward, it will push the city towards a critical state, as Dhaka can no longer afford to lose even a single leaf."

IMPLEMENTATION DELAYS

The project to modernise Osmani Udyan, initially set for completion in 2018, was stalled for almost two years after the original contractor, Builders Limited, had its work order cancelled in 2022 over allegations of contract breaches.

A new contractor was then appointed in September 2023.

After missing five deadlines, the new deadline has now been set for June 2025.

DSCC sources said it was first extended to June 2019, then to June 2020, June 2021, June 2022, and June 2024.

The project includes constructing boundary grills; gates on the north and south sides; walkways, including ones that link the Secretariat to Nagan Bhaban; a library; a food court; drainage systems; large jetties at the lakes; an indoor games zone; and parking facilities.

Osmani Udyan is home to numerous rare trees and plants, two small lakes, sand islands, sculptures, and an auditorium.

failure to take effective and visible steps over the last six months to bring fugitive autocrats and their accomplices to face trial.

This failure has encouraged people to take the law into their own hands and engage in "illegal activities", said the press release.

If the people take the law into their own hands while a government is in power, the government's image at home and abroad could be

tarnished."

The BNP highlighted the growing trend of public unrest, with people from various professions and classes taking to the streets with diverse demands at any time, often resorting to what the party termed as "mob culture".

This, the BNP claimed, is causing public suffering, and the government has failed to demonstrate the necessary competence in addressing these issues through appropriate measures.

Don't spiral once again

FROM PAGE 12

through consecutive unfair elections and then attempted to quell the 2024 uprising with excessive force, leading to over 800 deaths, the statement read.

"A mob in Bangladesh has demolished the Dhaka family home of ousted prime minister, Sheikh Hasina; properties owned by some of her relatives and party leaders were also targeted. The attack, a so-called "bulldozer procession," was announced and shared on social media. However, the authorities were still unable to protect the properties," the HRW said.

"There is growing demand on India to repatriate Hasina. But the Indian government will be required, under international standards, to evaluate risks ahead of extradition."

It also said the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, while facing a campaign of

misinformation about alleged abuses against religious and ethnic minorities, has yet to "successfully reassure minority groups, particularly Hindus, who fear attacks".

"The military is obstructing access to sites of previous unlawful detentions and destroying evidence, apparently to protect its image," the rights group said.

The HRW said that the Yunus government should propose a consensus resolution at the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Council session in March to request technical assistance, further investigations, and monitoring and reporting by UN-backed human rights experts.

The resolution should also acknowledge the tyranny of the previous administration and recognise positive human rights steps taken by the interim government, it added.

Putin sacks space agency chief after setbacks

AFP, MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday sacked the head of the Roscosmos space agency, the Kremlin said, citing the need to "develop" the corporation after suffering years of humiliating setbacks.

Yuri Borisov had been in the role since July 2022, presiding over the crash landing of the Luna-25 probe in August 2023, Moscow's first lunar lander mission in almost 50 years.

He has been replaced with Dmitry Bakanov, a 39-year-old deputy transport minister and former head of a satellite company, the Kremlin said.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the move was part of a "rotation", adding: "The corporation needs to dynamically develop."

Borisov often had extravagant ideas to develop Russia's space programme, including putting a nuclear reactor on the Moon with China, but struggled to put them into action.

Once a space-faring pioneer, Moscow has grappled with a loss of scientific talent and erratic funding since the collapse of the USSR, causing it to lag behind competitors like the United States and China.

The Russian segment of the International Space Station has suffered three coolant leaks in just over two years, with Moscow signalling it aims to pull out of the project as early as 2028 and build its own orbital station.

Borisov warned in 2023 that most Russian equipment on the station was beyond its warranty and that the ISS as a whole was "approaching the finish line of its existence".

Roscosmos also struggled with corruption under Borisov's tenure.

DB picks up Shaon

FROM PAGE 12

Mohammad Ali, around 6:00pm near Narundi Railway Station in Jamalpur Sadar upazila.

Mohammad Ali had sought an Awami League nomination for the Jamalpur-4 (Sadar) constituency ahead of the 12th parliamentary election last year.

Her mother, Begum Tahura Ali, served as an MP from the reserved seat for women from 1996-2001 and again from 2009-2014.

Later in the night, Sohana Saba was similarly taken into DB custody for questioning, said DMP Deputy Commissioner (media) Talebir Rahman.

The WhatsApp notification on the DMP media cell sent around 1:00am did not include any further details, so it is unclear why or from where she was picked up.

Kushtia erupts into protest

FROM PAGE 12

student leaders like Shahida Khatun, played a crucial role in mobilising public opinion.

Tamaddun Majlis, a prominent student organisation, also played a pivotal role, under the leadership of Abdus Sattar, a lecturer at Kushtia College and a former Dhaka University student, as the president of the Kushtia district unit.

The declaration of Urdu as the sole state language by then Pakistan Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin on January 27, 1952, sparked widespread protests in Kushtia, just like it did across the country.

On February 17, an important meeting, attended by members of the Tamaddun Majlis, political leaders, social and cultural figures, and student leaders, led to the formation of the All Party State Language Action Committee in Kushtia.

According to M Abdul Alim's "Bhasha Andolon Kosh Part 1," this committee spearheaded the movement, declaring February 21 as a day of protest.

Laflets demanding Bangla as the state language adorned the walls of Kushtia, while the sound of tin cans being blown echoed through the streets, amplifying the message of resistance.