

## Tk 28cr hole found in BSEC capacity-building project

AHSAN HABIB

The Anti-Corruption Commission and the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) have initially unearthed anomalies amounting to around Tk 28 crore in implementing the Regulatory Information System (RIS) project.

The project director was Saifur Rahman, an executive director at the BSEC who was sent into forced retirement last week.

The project, taken to enhance the capacity of the capital market, was financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under its Third Capital Market Development Program (CMDP3).

It would enable companies to submit monthly, quarterly and annual reports as well as financial statements online. It would also enable market intermediaries to apply for registration online.

In a letter sent on February 26, BSEC informed the Ministry of Finance of its findings.

The BSEC said the project director informed all departments of the BSEC on March 20 last year through an internal office memo that the RIS project had been implemented.

But the project was actually completed in June of 2022.

Later, the commission's MIS Division requested several other departments of the BSEC to provide their opinion on the RIS. However, subsequent negative feedback cast doubt on project implementation, according to the letter.

Still, the project director submitted a project completion report (PCR) to the Finance Division of the BSEC on December 23 last year. Strangely, that report was missing the signature of the BSEC chairman.

The negative feedback that the MIS division received about the RIS and the signatureless PCR are both indications of corruption, the BSEC said in its letter.

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No action taken based on white paper: economist

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government has not taken any of the measures recommended by the White Paper on the state of the economy and the task force, even after a long time since the report's submission, said an economist yesterday.

"We are yet to see any progress or discussion inside the government about the White Paper and the task force's recommendations," said Prof Selim Raihan, a

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No news notes this Eid

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The Bangladesh Bank has suspended the exchange of fresh notes for the public ahead of the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

In a directive issued on Sunday, the central bank instructed all the scheduled banks to comply with this directive.

According to the Bangladesh Bank, branches holding fresh notes must refrain from exchanging them and instead keep them in reserve. Banks have been advised to complete all cash transactions using re-circulated notes.

Arif Hossain Khan, a spokesperson at the Bangladesh Bank, said banknotes with new designs will be released in April-May.

Therefore, the existing notes with the previous designs are being withdrawn, and their circulation has also been suspended.

BB governor to visit UK for asset recovery

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Ahsan H Mansur will visit the United Kingdom (UK) as a part of efforts to recover laundered assets.

The information was disclosed by Press Secretary to the Chief Adviser (CA) Shafiqul Alam in a press briefing following a high-level meeting yesterday.

The meeting, titled "Recovery of Laundered Assets: Steps Taken and Challenges" was chaired by CA Muhammad Yunus and included an 11-member task force.

Allegations of rampant corruption, nepotism, and staggering capital flight have started to surface since former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled following last year's July-August student uprising. The interim government took the initiative to investigate into the alleged money laundering and bring back the siphoned-off money from abroad.

On March 17, the central bank governor is scheduled to speak to an All-Party Parliamentary Group on corruption, emphasising the need for the UK's support in Bangladesh's asset recovery efforts, including sanctions on those assets.

"We are requesting them to freeze the assets that have been transferred there and are currently being traced," said Alam.

On March 19, a half-day conference on asset recovery will take place, involving international law firms, investigation agencies, and litigation funders.

Meetings will also be held with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, National Crime Agency, and both the current and immediate past UK secretaries of state for justice.

The press secretary also informed that work is underway with the International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre and the World Bank's Stolen Asset Recovery (Star) Initiative to prepare for Bangladesh Asset Recovery Conference in London in early May.

The event will be attended by representatives from 8 to 10 money laundering destination countries, members of the Bangladesh task force, and other key stakeholders.

The press briefing highlighted that Bangladesh's asset recovery effort is among the largest and most complex in history.

Comparisons were drawn with Angola (\$15 billion), Malaysia's IMDB (\$11 billion), and Nigeria (\$5 billion).

It was further revealed that at least \$75 billion to \$100 billion in stolen assets from financial sector fraud, government contracts, and general corruption has primarily been transferred to the UK, US, Canada, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and various offshore tax havens.



## Tariff commission flags textile smuggling ahead of Eid

Proposes critical steps to safeguard industry



A woman browses through the apparel selection at an Aarong outlet in Dhaka. With festivities in full swing ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission focused on the need for urgent intervention to protect the domestic market for textiles, especially in the face of increasing competition from imports. The photo was taken recently.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With festivities in full swing ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission has emphasised the importance of safeguarding the local textile industry against the growing influx of imported garments.

As demand for apparel spikes during the country's largest shopping festival, the commission proposed several critical steps yesterday to counter the rising trend of imports, smuggling, and duty evasion that is threatening locally produced textiles.

According to a survey by the Bangladesh Shop Owners Association (BSOA), business worth around Tk 170,000 crore is conducted ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

With over Tk 37,000 crore spent on clothes.

However, smuggled garments often infiltrate shopping hubs, undercutting local producers, during this lucrative time.

In its recent report, the tariff commission focused on the need for urgent intervention to protect the domestic market for textiles, especially in the face of increasing competition from imports.

The Bangladesh Jamdani Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BJMEA) raised concerns about the rising availability of imported sarees, three-piece suits, "lehangas", and other garments, which could jeopardise the livelihoods of local weavers and manufacturers.

The commission's report

revealed that a significant amount of apparel enters the market through both legal and illegal channels.

The analysis shows that saree imports from India alone reached 3,300 tonnes in fiscal year 2022-2023, valued at Tk 28.26 crore, before dropping to 2,526 tonnes in FY24, valued at Tk 25.89 crore.

Similarly, in FY24, imports of three-piece dresses and "lehangas" hit 37,676 tonnes, valued at Tk 1,531.56 crore. Until December 9 of this fiscal year, 16,506 tonnes, valued at Tk 658.43 crore, were brought in.

The commission further noted that the average net price per piece of imported garments appears lower than current market prices.

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Square Pharma chairman to buy over Tk 32cr shares

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Samuel S Chowdhury, chairman of Square Pharmaceuticals, yesterday expressed his willingness to purchase 15 lakh shares of the company, valued at over Tk 32 crore at the current market price.

Also a sponsor of the company, Samuel plans to acquire the shares at the prevailing market price in both the public and block markets through the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) within the next 30 working days, Square Pharmaceuticals said in a disclosure on the premier bourse's website.

Square Pharmaceuticals' shares remained unchanged and closed at Tk 217.5 on the DSE yesterday.

In the last one month, similar announcements also came from the company's two other sponsor directors – Tapan Chowdhury and Anjan Chowdhury – who expressed their intentions to purchase 15 lakh shares each.

Yesterday, the largest drug maker said Anjan Chowdhury had completed his purchase of the shares of the company.

As of November 30 last year, Samuel held a 9.32 percent stake in Square Pharmaceuticals, a major concern of Square Group.

Following the purchase, his total stake in the company will increase to 9.49 percent.

As of January this year, sponsors and directors collectively held

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