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MONEY LAUNDERING NBR traces Tk 40,000cr in assets abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue has found assets worth nearly Tk 40,000 crore in five countries which it believes were bought with money laundered from Bangladesh, said the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday.

The findings came from investigations conducted by the Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) of the NBR.

CIC Director General Ahsan Habib briefed Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on the findings yesterday at the state guesthouse Jamuna in presence of NBR Chairman Md Abdur Rahman Khan.

The CIC also uncovered 352 foreign passports obtained by Bangladeshis through cash-for-citizenship schemes in nine countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, North Macedonia, Malta, Saint Lucia and Turkey.

In one case, a passport was purchased for \$1.2 million, CIC chief Habib said.

The assets traced by the CIC were located in Dubai, London, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Virginia and Florida, with the largest concentrations in Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai and London, an NBR official said on condition of anonymity.

The official noted that the process of realising Tk 10,000 crore in taxes and penalties from the identified taxpayers has already begun. "We have requested field offices to take steps in this regard," he added.

The CIC teams visited the destinations between January and April after gathering preliminary information from domestic sources.

- Assets traced to seven cities, including Singapore, KL, Dubai, and London
- Bangladeshis obtained 352 foreign passports from nine countries
- CIC detects 346 properties linked to Bangladeshi individuals, firms
- NBR takes steps to collect Tk 10,000cr in taxes and penalties

"So far, we have traced 346 properties in the names of individuals and companies through money laundering from Bangladesh. This represents only a partial picture of our investigation," said Habib.

He also revealed that during Sheikh Hasina's tenure, money launderers had installed their own operatives inside Bangladesh Bank to manipulate its central database, erasing large volumes of data. "The good news is that CIC has now developed the expertise to recover the information," he said.

Calling the findings "just the tip of the iceberg", Habib said the CIC, with support from more than six international organisations, is working to seize and repatriate the assets while ensuring punishment for those involved.

"We still have a large volume of information, which will require more time to uncover fully," he said.

The revelations echo previous reports. The White Paper panel on the economy estimated that an average of \$16 billion was siphoned abroad annually during Sheikh Hasina's "corrupt autocracy". And in an interview with the Financial Times last October, Bangladesh Bank Governor

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Hundreds of impounded battery-run auto-rickshaws, among other vehicles, at a dumping site near the Mansurabad Police Lines in the port city. After a pause of several months, the Chittagong Metropolitan Police resumed its special drive against the illegal rickshaws about a week ago. While the operation is bringing some order to city roads, it has also raised questions about the livelihood of the rickshaw-pullers. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

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Retired officials' promotions plunged civil service into crisis

BAHARAM KHAN

One year into the interim government's tenure, the public administration ministry remains in disarray, with erratic promotions and controversial decisions deepening instability in the civil service.

Instead of initiating reforms to make bureaucracy efficient and impartial, the ministry opted for a flurry of retrospective promotions for retired officials—many of them mired in controversy. This led to mistrust and resentment among around 15 lakh public employees, according to current and former officials.

"Since the mass uprising, many incompetent and corrupt officials, alongside some deserving ones, have been granted retrospective promotions, angering a large section of bureaucrats," said an official from the 31st BCS batch, seeking anonymity for fear of reprisal.

Official records show that 764 retired officials of administration cadre were given retrospective promotions on February 9. Of them, 119 were promoted to secretary and over 500 to additional secretary.

In total, around 1,500 officers were elevated to the ranks of deputy secretary, joint secretary, and additional secretary—an unprecedented number of promotions in such a short period. Many of them face corruption allegations.

"The country's civil service remains unstable and fragile because the post-

uprising period saw appointments of some incompetent officials in the top tier," Firoz Miah, an expert on public administration, told The Daily Star.

"The officials are not the only ones at fault; those who selected them are equally responsible," said Firoz, also a former additional secretary.

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A woman dries paddy on higher ground yesterday after moving her cattle and belongings to safety, as rising waters from the Padma have triggered floods in Char Majhardiya in Rajshahi's Paba upazila. Many families have already left their inundated homes and taken shelter elsewhere.

PHOTO: AZHAR UDDIN

Will not let Bangladesh be a haven for extremism
Says Tarique



UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman has said the party's goal is to ensure that Bangladesh never turns into a haven for extremism or fundamentalism.

He made the comments while speaking virtually at a views-exchange meeting with writers and poets yesterday. The event titled "The Role and Duties of Poets and Writers in the Transition to Democracy" was organised by the BNP.

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BNP reaching out to Hefazat, others
Move seen as effort to undercut possible Jamaat-IAB clout in polls

RASHIDUL HASAN

With Islamist parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Islami Andolok Bangladesh (IAB), moving to forge an "electoral consensus", the BNP is working to bring Hefazat-e-Islam and smaller Islamist groups closer to it ahead of the next parliamentary election.

BNP leaders say though they are engaged in discussions with different Islamist groups, the chances of a formal alliance remain slim.

The rise of Islamist forces since the August 5 uprising has prompted BNP policymakers to keep a close watch on shifting political dynamics. And as part of its strategy, the party has reached out to Hefazat's ameer and other influential clerics, while also extending attention to smaller Islamist outfits.

The party plans courtesy meetings between its leaders and religious figures nationwide, including prominent clerics, heads of major religious institutions, and spiritual leaders of Khanqah Sharifs.

Party sources said BNP's top policymakers and central leaders with regional clout will strive to secure support from madrasa teachers, students, and religious figures, while preventing them from aligning exclusively with rivals.

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Amid Chalan Beel worries, Rabindra University gets EcneC's conditional nod

University says the wetland won't be harmed

REJAUL KARIM BYRON, PINAKI ROY and AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The EcneC yesterday approved the construction of Rabindra University in Sirajganj, despite objections from several advisers over the plan to build it by filling up a wetland.

The approval, however, came with the condition that the authorities must first secure an environmental clearance certificate.

"Many advisers raised their voices against the establishment of the Rabindra University near Chalan Beel for environmental reasons. The project has been approved on condition, meaning the project fund will not be disbursed until the condition is met," said an adviser who attended the meeting in which the project proposal was approved.

The advisers discussed the issue for nearly an hour, with some warning that construction in Buripothajia of Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila would block the water discharge path of the Chalan Beel.

Planning Adviser Prof Dr Wahid Uddin Mahmud said, "The project has been



approved strictly in line with the proper legal and procedural process. I'll not go beyond the rules.

"There are concerns among environmentalists about the designated site.... It is now up to the Department of Environment to carry out a full evaluation."

9 YEARS WITHOUT A CAMPUS
Rabindra University was approved in 2015 and began academic activities in 2018.

It initially operated from Shahzadpur Women's College before shifting to other temporary sites scattered across the upazila.

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