

Audit uncovers embezzlement

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embezzled funds.

In a letter to Bangladesh Bank on Monday, the bank said it filed a Tk 35 crore money suit on March 11 over funds allegedly misused in the name of the Premier Bank Foundation.

It also filed two separate suits on March 15 seeking recovery of Tk 3,053.79 crore misappropriated under house rent and vendor payment heads.

The accused include Iqbal, his son, and former vice-chairman Moin Iqbal; former directors; former top officials; and others.

The Daily Star has obtained copies of the audit report, case documents, and the bank's communication with the central bank.

Iqbal, a former Awami League lawmaker, left the country following the political changeover in August 2024. He stepped down as Premier Bank chairman in January 2025 after leading it for 26 years since its founding in 1999.

Current Chairman Arifur Rahman told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh Bank reconstituted the board on August 19, 2025. He said the new board identified major weaknesses in corporate governance and evidence of fund embezzlement during the previous board's tenure.

To assess the scale of irregularities, six audit firms were appointed, he said, adding that a report by Ernst & Young has already been shared, while the MABS & J Partners audit quantified specific misappropriated amounts.

Arifur also said the new board is taking broader steps to strengthen accountability and governance while pursuing recovery.

OFFICE RENT

The audit found that more than Tk 406.35 crore was misappropriated

between January 2018 and September 2025 through rental agreements signed and renewed at inflated rates with a related-party landlord linked to Iqbal and his family.

The bank paid rents far above market rates, along with excessive service charges, advance payments covering 24-36 months, VAT on inflated amounts, and additional cost-of-fund losses. Many premises were underutilised and commercially unjustifiable.

According to the report, Iqbal, while chairman and owner of Iqbal Centre, secured rental deals at Tk 350-506 per square foot against prevailing market rates of Tk 120-160. These arrangements formed part of a structured scheme to extract bank funds, contributing Tk 2,719.88 crore to the overall financial impact.

CSR, PUBLICITY

The audit identified Tk 607 crore misappropriated through irregular spending on CSR, publicity, advertisement, entertainment, business development, foundation contributions, and other discretionary heads.

It cited widespread control failures, including absence of competitive quotations, incomplete vouchers, missing supporting documents, lack of utilisation reports, and inadequate verification. Some payments were made to related parties or yielded no clear commercial benefit.

Of Tk 128 crore recorded as CSR spending for blankets, relief, and donations, a significant portion of goods was delivered partially, or not delivered at all. Transactions exceeding Tk 5 crore showed Tk 74.49 crore embezzled through five vendor accounts.

GENERAL LEDGER

The "Sundry Debtors" account

was used as a major channel for embezzlement, the report said, with Tk 667.15 crore transferred to vendors, entities, and one personal account without valid approvals, work orders, or contracts.

Though recorded as temporary advances, the entries enabled immediate diversion of funds. The process originated at the bank's General Services Division, passed through its Financial Administration Division, and was executed via the Banani branch.

Vendor interviews and forensic analysis confirmed that Tk 655.50 crore was misappropriated through 22 vendors and one personal account.

PRINTING, STATIONERY, BPL

Tk 129.36 crore was recorded under printing and stationery for calendars and annual reports, but only 30-35 percent of billed items were delivered. The audit found Tk 81.73 crore misappropriated, including Tk 80.62 crore paid to Color Web through inflated quantities and pricing.

In addition, Tk 44.99 crore was embezzled in franchise expenses for Khulna Tigers in the Bangladesh Premier League. The actual franchise cost was Tk 6 crore, with Tk 3.35 crore paid to the Bangladesh Cricket Board, while Tk 32.50 crore was diverted through inflated contracts.

The audit also identified hundreds of crores of taka siphoned off through inflated or unjustified spending on office interiors, renovation, construction, business development, television advertisements, advance vendor payments, and premises repairs during the period.

The Daily Star attempted to contact Iqbal and Moin via phone, text, and WhatsApp since April 6, but received no response.

Dhaka, Delhi talk supplies of diesel

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and Oil and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Puri in New Delhi. He also met Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval over dinner on Tuesday.

This is the first ministerial visit to India since the BNP government assumed office, a move expected to reset bilateral ties that became strained after the political changeover in August 2024.

Rahman thanked Puri for India's recent diesel supply and sought increased volumes of diesel and fertiliser. In turn, Puri indicated the request would be considered "readily and favourably," according to the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

Bangladesh also asked India to extradite deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, both sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal.

The Indian response was not mentioned in the statement.

Rahman further thanked India for arresting suspects in the killing of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi. Both sides agreed the detainees would be returned to Bangladesh under the extradition treaty.

During talks, Jaishankar said Indian visas for Bangladeshis — particularly medical and business visas — would be eased in the coming weeks.

India had sharply reduced visas after the July 2024 political changeover, while Bangladesh later restricted visas for Indians.

In late February, the Bangladesh missions in India resumed issuing all categories of visas. India is yet to resume visas fully.

According to foreign policy analysts, India and Bangladesh both signalled improving relations, though there are areas of friction, such as the extradition of Hasina and other Awami League leaders living in India.

There are many issues — water sharing, trade, tourism, and



healthcare — that affect the life and livelihoods of the people in both the countries.

The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty expires in December this year, while the Teesta water sharing has been hanging for a long time.

"Renewing the Ganges water-sharing treaty will be a test of the relationship," said former ambassador M Humayun Kabir.

How much these issues were discussed or not was not known.

Dhaka and Delhi mutually agreed to undertake consultations on key bilateral issues, however.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs in a separate statement said Jaishankar reiterated India's desire to engage constructively with the new government of Bangladesh and further strengthen bilateral ties.

"The two sides agreed to explore proposals for deepening the partnership through the relevant bilateral mechanisms. Follow-on official meetings are expected to take place at an early date," it said.

Further, both sides exchanged views on regional and global issues of

mutual interest, the statement said.

After the meeting, S Jaishankar said, "Pleased to host FM Khalilur Rahman of Bangladesh and his delegation this afternoon. Agreed to remain in close touch."

Hardeep Singh Puri shared on X that he discussed with Khalilur Rahman bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

Last evening, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman attended a reception where he sought the support of India and other countries for his candidacy as president of the UN General Assembly.

Khalilur is scheduled to fly to Mauritius from New Delhi today to attend the Indian Ocean Conference from April 10-12. Jaishankar will also be attending the event, providing scopes for further interactions between foreign ministers of Bangladesh and India, diplomatic sources said.

Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humaimun Kobir and Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Riaz Hamidullah were present at these meetings.

Tribunal to deliver verdict today

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face charges of murder, attempted murder, superior command responsibility, abetment, and complicity in crimes against humanity.

The other accused include former RMP deputy commissioner Abu Maruf Hossain; ex-additional deputy commissioner Shah Nur Alam Patwari, who was later promoted to superintendent of police; assistant commissioner Md Arifuzzaman (Kotwali zone); Tajhat Police Station OC Rabiul Islam; university's police outpost in-charge and sub-inspector Bibhuti Bhushan Roy, and pro-Awami League Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad leader Sarwar Hossain Chandan.

Twenty-four of the accused,

including former VC Hasibur and ex-RMP commissioner Moniruzzaman, are fugitives, while six are in jail.

Those who are in the prison are: former university proctor Shariful Islam, former assistant registrar Rafiul Hasan, former contractual employee of the registrar's office Anwar Parvez, former assistant sub-inspector Amir Hossain, former constable Sujan Chandra Roy, and banned Chhatra League leader Imran Chowdhury alias Akash.

On August 5, 2025, the tribunal framed charges against all 30, detailing their alleged roles in aiding, inciting, or directly carrying out the shooting that killed Sayed, who was unarmed at the time.

That year, the prosecution

submitted the formal charge on June 30, following the investigation agency's probe report filed on June 24.

On August 27, the trial began with the deposition of Sayed's father, Mokbul Hossain. Twenty-five prosecution witness testified in the case.

Sayed was shot dead on July 16, 2024, during a student protest in Rangpur against the quota system in government jobs.

A video showing him being shot by police with arms outstretched in defiance went viral, turning him into an icon of resistance.

His killing is widely seen as a turning point that galvanised the mass uprising, which culminated in the fall of Sheikh Hasina's regime on August 5, 2024.

Ratify key human rights ordinances

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the current ordinances and serve only to bring them further in line with international standards, including the Paris Principles, and remove the death penalty as a punishment from the Enforced Disappearance Ordinance 2025," the statement said.

The organisations also said the BNP government faces a major test just six weeks after taking office and should pass the ordinances without weakening them to show its commitment to a rights-respecting future.

The signatories include the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Fortify Rights, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, Tech Global Institute, and the United Against Torture Consortium (UATC), including the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), Omega Research Foundation, Redress, and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

According to the statement, four ordinances adopted by the interim

government, the NHRC Ordinance 2025, its amendment ordinance 2025, the Enforced Disappearance Ordinance 2025, and its amendment ordinance 2026, together created a framework to rebuild the NHRC and move it closer to compliance with the Paris Principles and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

"If the ordinances are not passed soon, the law will revert to the NHRC Act 2009, under which the NHRC was toothless and ineffective in addressing human rights violations, including by security forces," the statement read.

It added that the Enforced Disappearance Ordinance 2025 empowers the NHRC to investigate disappearances, building on the work of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED).

The COIED received 1,569 complaints of disappearances and documented 287 victims who remain missing, the statement said.

"Critically, the ordinances establish enforced disappearance as a distinct crime under Bangladesh law for the

first time and provide remedies for victims and their families," it added.

The organisation also said that the Paris Principles, which set out international standards for national human rights institutions, require that the NHRC should be independent of the government.

"As such, it should not be under the oversight of any government ministry. The existing ordinance provides an improved basis for the institution's transparency and accountability as an independent body. The NHRC needs to remain empowered to open investigations as it deems necessary."

A requirement to seek government "permission" to investigate the security forces, for instance, would entirely undermine its independence. For the same reason, it is vital that government representatives do not dominate the committee for selecting commissioners, it added.

The rights organisations also said the ordinances have produced key human rights reforms, and there is a risk that such progress will be lost if the ordinances are not passed by the new government.

Fuel supply relief likely weeks away

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tonnes of diesel, 22,000 tonnes of jet fuel and 25,000 tonnes of furnace oil.

The remaining shipments — comprising 118,400 tonnes of diesel, 200,000 tonnes of crude oil and 25,000 tonnes of jet fuel — failed to arrive due to the conflict.

While two of these parcels, carrying 25,000 tonnes of diesel and 25,000 tonnes of furnace oil, are expected to arrive this week, there is still no assurance regarding the delivery of the remaining five parcels, according to BPC officials.

The ceasefire has created the possibility for the delayed shipments to resume, said Monir Hossain Chowdhury, spokesperson and joint secretary at the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

Vessel movement through the Strait of Hormuz is expected to restart, and discussions are underway to ensure the delivery of previously

stalled parcels.

A shipment of 100,000 tonnes of Arabian Light crude oil from Saudi Arabia is likely to cross the Strait within a day or two.

The vessel was originally scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh in mid-March, but failed to do so due to the conflict.

"Similarly, there are now positive indications that other shipments delayed by the war may also begin to arrive," he added.

This means Eastern Refinery, the country's lone refinery, can crank up its production back to full capacity as low crude stock prompted the authorities to slow down daily processing to less than half its normal capacity.

A report sent by BPC to the ministry on April 1 shows that ERL's crude stock has fallen to its lowest level in two decades: usable reserves stood at just 19,000 tonnes, enough to run the refinery for only four to five

days.

Under BPC's quarterly procurement plan, contracts have been signed to import around 476,000 tonnes of refined fuel in April, to be delivered through 15 seaborne cargoes and five pipeline shipments.

The planned imports include 311,000 tonnes of diesel, 65,000 tonnes of jet fuel, 50,000 tonnes of furnace oil and 50,000 tonnes of octane.

In addition, there is a plan to import 100,000 tonnes of crude oil from Saudi Arabia this month.

Contracts are in place to import around 490,000 tonnes of refined fuel in May and 410,000 tonnes in June, although confirmation of the shipments is still pending.

The overall import volume could increase further if the suppliers awarded contracts under direct procurement processes are able to deliver on schedule, BPC officials said.

BNP still sorting

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give my best for the party during its difficult times. Now the time has come for the party to give its best in evaluating us. I only hope the party will think about us.

"I believe, and the BNP also believes, that those who made sacrifices for the party, went to jail, faced cases, and suffered both personally and within their families will get priority. Those who are educated, decent, and have the skill to play a strong role in parliament will also be given importance."

The BNP has attached importance to former reserved-seat lawmakers from 2001 and 2008, considering their past parliamentary experience and organisational background.

Among senior leaders under discussion are Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal President Afroza Abbas, wife of

BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas, MP, and Mohila Dal General Secretary Sultana Ahmed, who was a reserved seat lawmaker in 2001.

Besides, those under consideration include former 2001 reserved seat lawmakers and BNP leaders Rehana Akter, Bilkis Islam, Rasheda Begum Hira, Newaz Halima Arly, and Helen Zerin Khan. BNP central committee member Shirin Sultana, a former reserved seat lawmaker in 1996, is among the aspirants, along with Dhaka district BNP General Secretary Nipun Roy Chowdhury.

BNP Chairperson's Adviser and singer Baby Naznin and Mayer Daak coordinator Sanjida Islam Tulee are also being discussed.

Among those from the 2008 reserved seats are BNP Local Government Affairs Assistant

Secretary Shammi Akter and BNP Human Rights Affairs Assistant Secretary Syeda Ashifa Ashrafi Papia.

According to BNP insiders, the final selection will depend on political balancing, regional representation, and internal consensus.

Meanwhile, Jamaat women's wing leaders said they are waiting for the central command's announcement, which will formally declare the final list of candidates.

Women's Affairs Secretary Nurunnisa Siddika said, "Earlier, our women's wing submitted a list of 12 names to the central executive council. The nominations have already been finalised, but we are yet to be informed."

"The candidates included are those who can present their views clearly and who have strong educational qualifications."

Govt fast-tracks nationwide drive

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About the 30-upazila drive currently underway, he said it is progressing smoothly, with around 98 percent of the coverage target met.

Rumeen Farhana, an independent MP from Brahmanbaria-2, yesterday pointed out in parliament that health workers who carry vaccines to the grassroots have not received wages for the past nine months.

In a notice calling attention to urgent public matters during a parliamentary session chaired by Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, she raised alarm over gaps in vaccination and the fatal measles outbreak.

"The interim government had not placed any new orders for the vaccine. A total of 35 districts have only half the health workers they need to carry out vaccinations, and suffer from shortages and lack of recruitment," Rumeen said.

The health minister confirmed that the health workers had not been getting paid.

Police recover bodies

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to be slaughtered later," said Md Hasan Ali, officer-in-charge of Gazaria Police Station.

Locals allege that a syndicate has been slaughtering horses to sell the meat as beef.

Police, however, could not confirm the allegation. "We still don't know the exact reason behind the horse slaughtering. We are investigating it," the OC told The Daily Star.

According to Livestock Department officials, slaughtering and selling horse meat is against the law and a punishable offence.

The incident comes amid growing concerns over the illegal slaughter and sale of horse meat in parts of the country.

On December 22, 2025, police detained nine people in Gazipur while

"The porters haven't gotten paid for the last nine months, it is true," he said, adding that the government has held meetings and will start rolling out payments in phases within a day or two.

During his response, the minister listed 18 measles hotspots in the country — Barguna, Dhaka's Nawabganj, Shariatpur, Jhalokathi, Chandpur, Cox's Bazar, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Gazipur, Jashore, Mymensingh, Netrakona, Pabna, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj and Natore. "In these districts, the hotspots are either localised within one upazila or two upazilas."

He, however, claimed that there are enough health workers to carry out vaccination programmes.

Meanwhile, 10 more people died of suspected measles in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of suspected measles deaths to 138 since March 15 this year, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Of the 10 deaths, six were reported from Dhaka division, three from Rajshahi, and one from Khulna, it added.

Besides, 1,248 new suspected cases were recorded during this period, raising the total number of cases to 11,133 since March 15.

The DGHS, however, said it has confirmed a total of 21 deaths as measles-related, along with 1,599 confirmed cases so far.

Samples from suspected patients are tested at reference laboratories in Dhaka, a process that takes considerable time. Suspected cases are included in the list, and confirmed cases are updated later, creating a discrepancy between the two figures, DGHS officials said.

Besides, rash and fever, the main symptoms of measles, are common to several other diseases. Therefore, not all suspected cases are ultimately confirmed, which contributes to the difference between suspected and confirmed deaths, they added.

Iraqi armed group releases US journalist

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's powerful armed group Kataeb Hezbollah on Tuesday released US journalist Shelly Kittleson, a week after she was kidnapped in Baghdad, the Iranian-backed group and the United States said.

Her release was announced hours before the United States and Iran agreed to a ceasefire in more than one month of war, which spread in a region-wide conflict.

"In recognition of the national stances of the outgoing prime minister, we have decided to release the American defendant Shelly Kittleson, on the condition that she leave the country immediately," Abu Mujahid al-Assaf, a security official in the Iran-backed group, said in a brief statement.