

Malaysian labour market scam: 4 ex-MPs, minister's family loot Tk20 thousand crore

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Online Desk : The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has started an inquiry into accusations against four former lawmakers over embezzlement in the Malaysian labour market. The syndicate formed by these four MPs has profited worth nearly Tk20,000 crore over the past one year and a half. According to the ACC sources, a three-member committee led by its Deputy Director Mohammad Nurul Huda has been formed to investigate the allegations against them. The summary prepared by the ACC regarding the complaints against these four MPs names them as former Finance Minister A.H.M. Mustafa Kamal, former Feni-2 MP Nizam Uddin Hazari, former Feni-3 MP Lt. Gen. (retd.) Masud Uddin Chowdhury, and former Dhaka-20 MP Benazir Ahmed. Two companies associated with the syndicate are registered under the names of Mustafa Kamal's wife Kashmeri Kamal and his daughter Nafisa Kamal. Since 5 August, following the fall of Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, all four have been in hiding. It is reported that Mustafa Kamal is in Singapore.

The summary further reveals that a total of 9,861 individuals traveled to Malaysia through Orbital Enterprises, owned by Kashmeri Kamal, and Orbital International, owned by Nafisa Kamal. At the time of the formation of the syndicate, Mustafa Kamal was serving as the Finance Minister. Former MP Nizam Uddin Hazari obtained a recruiting agency license for Snigdha Overseas Limited in December 2018 to send workers abroad. However, in the following three and a half years, Snigdha sent only 100 workers abroad. Besides, around 8,000 workers were sent under the agency of Nizam Hazari within a year and a half. Former MP Masud Uddin Chowdhury established a recruiting agency named Five M International in 2015. Five M International has become the top agency for sending workers to Malaysia, having sent 8,592 workers there. Although it sent about 2,500 workers to the Middle East, its primary focus has been on Malaysia.

Former MP Benazir Ahmed's company Ahmed International ranks fifth in sending workers to Malaysia. Before entering the Malaysian syndicate, Ahmed International had minimal experience, having sent only 238 workers abroad. However, once involved with the syndicate, it quickly rose to prominence, sending 7,849 workers to Malaysia. At the time of the syndicate's formation, Benazir was the president of BAIRA, the association of recruiting agencies. The ACC says besides the agencies owned by these three MPs and one MP's family members, various leaders of the Awami League, city corporation councilors, and many new agencies in the sector have sent a significant number of workers. Fourteen countries, including Bangladesh, send workers to Malaysia, but none of them operate under such a syndicate system like Bangladesh. High-ranking officials from both the Bangladeshi and Malaysian governments are also involved with the syndicate. The agencies in this syndicate are reportedly collecting at least Tk1.5 lakh as "syndicate fees" per worker. Among the other prominent agencies are Ayesha International, New Age International, Catharsis International, BNS Overseas Limited, PR Overseas, Sadia International, Imperial Overseas, BM Travels Limited, and Anannya Apurba Recruiting Agency.

The government has set a maximum cost of Tk78,990 for sending a worker to Malaysia. However, on average, a Bangladeshi worker has spent around Tk544,000 to go to Malaysia. Over the course of a year and a half, approximately 450,000 workers were sent, leading to a business of 24,000 crore BDT in this sector. Out of this, 20,000 crore BDT was taken as extra fees above the government-mandated charges, with more than 6,500 crore BDT being collected as syndicate fees. Ruhul Amin, also known as Swapan, is identified as the ringleader of the Malaysian labor market syndicate.