

Padma Graft Plot Probe

ACC looks at Canada

M Rahman The Daily Star March 15, 2014

The Anti-Corruption Commission's probe into the corruption conspiracy over the Padma bridge project is unlikely to see further progress until Canada completes the trial of its three citizens allegedly involved in the plot, according to ACC officials. The three ex-officials of Canadian consultancy firm SNC Lavalin -- Mohammad Ismail, Ramesh Shah and Kevin Wales -- allegedly tried to give bribes to Bangladesh officials to help the firm get the supervision work of the project.

The ACC sent two teams -- one in May and the other in November last year -- to Canada to interrogate the trio and collect a copy of the diary after the commission filed a case on December 17, 2012 over the corruption conspiracy in the project. But the counsels for the trio didn't allow the ACC teams to interrogate them, saying the three were facing the same charge at a Canadian court.

The ACC teams also failed to collect a certified copy of Ramesh's diary from the Canadian trial court, as the Canadian Department of Justice rejected the commission's request, saying it would consider giving the ACC necessary documents after the trial, said an ACC source.

"We are waiting for the verdict of the Canadian trial court, as both the ACC teams that visited Canada failed to interrogate them [the three Canadians] and collect a copy of the diary," said ACC Commissioner Mohammad Shahbuddin.

Several top ACC officials said the commission couldn't glean enough information from the accused and the suspects in the case, and it wouldn't be possible for the ACC to complete the probe without getting a copy of the diary or grilling the three Canadians.

The commission also failed to retrieve contents of e-mail correspondence between the ex-SNC Lavalin officials, former secretary of Bridge Division Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and Superintendent Engineer of Bangladesh Bridge Authority Kazi Mohammad Ferdous.

"We engaged IT experts to retrieve the e-mail contents relating to the corruption conspiracy, but they failed," said a top ACC official on condition of anonymity.

In his diary seized by the Canadian police, Ramesh allegedly mentioned that the then communications minister Syed Abul Hossain would get 4 percent of SNC Lavalin's supervision fees of \$47.5 million as bribe to help the Canadian firm get the job.

The ACC brought charges of corruption conspiracy against seven people but excluded Abul and ex-state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury from the list of accused in the case.

The seven accused are ex-secretary of Bridge Division Mosharraf, Superintendent Engineer of Bangladesh Bridge Authority Ferdous, Executive Engineer of Roads and Highway Department Reaz Ahmed Zaber, local agent of SNC Lavalin Mohammad Mostofa and ex-officials of the Canadian firm Ismail, Ramesh and Wales. The ACC arrested Mosharraf and Ferdous on December 26, 2012 following the filing of the case. They were later released on bail.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police earlier brought charges against former Bangladeshi state minister Hasan, Canadian citizen Zulfiqar Ali Bhuiyan and three ex-SNC Lavalin officials Wales, Ismail and Ramesh over the alleged corruption in the bridge project.