DHAKA - Bangladesh has sought from the US the money that was allegedly stashed away by opposition leader Khaleda Zia’s businessman son in a telecom deal signed during her tenure.

Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith Monday said he was ‘optimistic’ about getting back the money siphoned off by Arafat Rahman Koko, Zia’s younger son.

‘We are trying to get the money back and some steps have already been taken in this regard,’ Muhith told the country’s parliament, The Daily Star said Tuesday.

The minister said a case filed with the Columbia District Court in the US is under trial. ‘Discussion is going on between us and the United States... there are agreements and there will be a deal. So, I hope we will be able to bring the money back,’ he said.

The US government confiscated over Tk 110 million ($1.6 million) siphoned off by Koko, who is currently convalescing in a Singapore hospital.

The money is part of the kickback allegedly received in a deal with German telecom major Siemens for laying mobile phone network in Bangladesh.

Dhaka acted with Singapore authorities last December to confiscate another bank account.

Zia has denied any wrongdoing on her son’s part and says the charges are politically motivated.

However, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) says it has firm evidence.
The minister said information about others being involved in the telecom scam was yet to come.

Muhith also said the present government, eager to curb corruption, had taken steps to obtain the wealth statements of all ministers and lawmakers.

‘In phases the government will take measures to obtain wealth accounts of all people,’ he said, adding that wealth statements of all government officials have already been taken.

- Sources

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