

Sri Lanka court orders arrest of ex-speaker's son over Airbus deal

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Dhaka: Colombo Fort Magistrate Isuru Neththikumara on Monday, February 2, ordered the arrest and production before court of Shameendra Rajapaksa, the youngest son of former Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa. The move follows his naming as the third suspect in a case concerning alleged irregularities in SriLankan Airlines' purchase of Airbus aircraft.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) submitted reports detailing accusations of corruption related to the attempted acquisition of 10 aircraft during 2012-2013. The attorney general instructed authorities to list Shameendra Rajapaksa as a suspect in the ongoing probe.

Former SriLankan Airlines CEO Kapila Chandrasena and his wife are already suspects in the case and are currently out on bail.

The magistrate directed the CID to seek INTERPOL assistance for the arrest of Rajapaksa, reportedly residing in the United States. The court also ordered steps to issue a Red Notice for him.

The Airbus deal involved replacing 13 existing aircraft with 14 new planes. Under the agreement, SriLankan Airlines planned to purchase six A330s and four A350s from the French manufacturer.

Investigations revealed Airbus had allegedly agreed to pay a USD 16.84 million bribe connected to the transaction. Around USD 2 million from this sum was reportedly transferred to a Brunei-based company controlled by Kapila Chandrasena's wife.

Further probes uncovered multiple fund transfers via a Singaporean account into Chandrasena's Australian bank account. Investigators also identified a transfer of USD 160,000 in 2013 into an account belonging to Shameendra Rajapaksa.

Shameendra Rajapaksa was reportedly a member of the board during the Airbus deal, with one key meeting held at the Speaker's official residence. Investigation files have been submitted to the attorney general, who advised naming him as the third suspect in the case.

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