



Most banks can't counter robbery

A 10-point Bangladesh Bank directive to strengthen security, issued more than a year ago, goes unheeded

MIZANUR KHAN

Recent robberies in many banks in the city have brought to light inadequate security measures although the Bangladesh Bank asked the banks to ensure proper safety more than a year ago.

Armed robbers looted cash from branches of a number of nationalised banks in Dhaka and other cities and towns of the country over the last few months,

the most recent being the Tk 8 lakh robbed from Rupali Bank's Malibagh branch on January 24.

The Bangladesh Bank, which issued directives in October, 2002, asked all local banks to implement its 10-point measures for protection against armed robbers.

In a letter to the banks, the BB laid out the following instructions:

1. Deploy at least three guards at every branch,
2. One 24-hour armed guard at each branch,
3. Withdraw firearms from the branches with no guards,
4. Test effectiveness of the arms,
5. Train the bank officials and employees about security,
6. Ensure security of 'strong rooms',
7. Install close circuit cameras,
8. Ensure presence of armed guards during money transfers,
9. Create money security pool in district towns and financially important places,
10. Create a post -- director of security -- on the board of directors.

Most of the 6,233 branches of 49 banks in the country are hardly equipped to counter robberies.

Statistics show that the robbers have not yet targeted private banks as security arrangements of these banks are much more systematic.

One thousand four hundred and twelve branches of 30 local private banks and 31 branches of 10 foreign commercial banks are better equipped in terms of security as they hire personnel from

private security firms.

Shahjahan Sarkar, an official of SouthEast Bank, said that there were no incidents of robberies in private banks. He, however, believes that a bank cannot be robbed without the help of insiders.

"Private banks employ more guards, install close circuit television cameras (CCTV) and modernised alarm systems that prevent such incidents," he said.

Asked about the poor security

in public banks, a high official of Janata Bank said that private banks can take action very quickly. "How can we install CCTV in our branches when we are not even able to provide our employees with necessary table and chairs," he asked.

"As we are not allowed to deploy police force directly we are now considering to take help of the private security agencies. At present the alternative is to use security personnel from Ansars

and VDP," said Mofazzal Hossain, Deputy General Manager of a public bank.

One or two policemen, who are traditionally deployed in front of the branches with 'outdated weapons' are in no position to fight armed gangs with modern and sophisticated firearms, observed many bank officials.

Alarmed at the spate of looting in 2002, the police headquarters made 10 points to be adopted by the banks for safety. The points

were sent to the finance ministry. Later Bangladesh Bank circulated the letter to all banks.

"We cannot expect that the banks will be secure when the entire society is unsafe. These bank robberies are no isolated incidents," said a dejected bank official.



One-man-security with outdated arms is still a commonplace at most city banks.

Tale of robberies

Five in the city in last 21 months

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Around Tk 73.28 lakh from five banks in the capital was robbed by miscreants in the last 21 months.

The latest robbery took place on January 24 this year at the DIT road branch of Rupali Bank in Malibagh. A gang in connivance with employees of the bank looted Tk 8,06,267 by breaking into the strong room and vault.

On March 4, 2002, Jute Research Institute branch of Sonali Bank, only a few hun-

dred metres from the parliament building, was robbed and Tk 17,00,000 was taken away.

This was one of the most daring instances of crime in recent years.

On November 11 the same year, masked gunmen looted Tk 13.28 lakh from Pubali Bank's Tejgaon Shatrasa Crossing branch. The gang herded all 13 employees, officials and some clients into the vault room and switched off power before leaving in a microbus with their booty.

Another branch of Pubali Bank at Rampura Bazar was

robbed by a gang of 12 on June 3, 2003. Tk 6.5 lakh was looted in that incident. Armed gunmen also took Tk 1.6 lakh from two clients.

Inside the bank, two members of the gang went straight to the chamber of the bank manager and forced him and two customers into a bathroom. Others climbed the glass wall of the cash counter and looted money.

Just 11 days later, one more branch of Pubali Bank at Bangabandhu Avenue was looted. A security guard of the branch allegedly took off with

about Tk 27 lakh in cash and prize bonds on June 14, 2003.

Guard Abu Daud Sheikh decamped with the booty leaving a note to the bank manager. In the note he said, "By the time you receive this letter, I will be in India. I am not taking anything from the bank but leaving this note as I can not escape the blame."

He claimed that a group of 12 sneaked into the bank when he was asleep and took away the money after beating him up.

Curzon Hall needs care

The historic building at DU steps into its 100th year tomorrow

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Curzon Hall, one of the finest lime concrete structures with historical value that steps into its 100th year tomorrow, is losing its glory to lack of repair blamed on fund shortage.

The lime concrete of the ceiling was falling apart, Shahidullah Hall Provost Professor Abul Khaer told Star City. "The rundown railing of balconies proved a danger to students and teachers."

The building on Dhaka University (DU) campus was renovated with a fund of Tk 27 lakh years back when Professor Fazul Halim was in the chair.

Professor Khayer says a repeat of the Jagannath Hall tragedy is likely, as none of the old buildings is maintained, adding authorities could talk to Unesco (United Nations Educa-

tional, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation) and the education ministry to preserve the heritage of Curzon Hall.

"The building needs immediate renovation," he said, adding it should be rebuilt retaining its originality.

The imposing edifice built in 1904 and named after Lord Curzon, the then governor of India, is a faade of the Mughal, Roman and British architectures. Students are disappointed, as authorities did not decide yet to celebrate the centenary of Curzon Hall.

"The architectural beauty of Curzon Hall inspired me," said Marufuzzaman Mithu, an aquaculture and fisheries student.

"I visited Curzon Hall when I was a Dhaka College student. I dreamt of studying here. My dream came true, but the building is now losing its beauty," said Mithu, strolling in the lawn that skirted the building glowing in the

afternoon sun.

Instead of repairing tumble-down balconies, the DU engineering division removed five of the nine structures, as the authorities did not funnel funds into maintenance.

The removal of the grandiose balconies -- built on a design that let in ventilation, typical of the sub-continent's architectural patterns -- took away much of the beauty of the building.

An extension to the biochemistry department in the same complex provided a cover for engineers to remove the balconies, closeted away from public view.

Science teachers said the DU did not renovate the building for years and tends to avoid the issue on grounds of insufficient funds.

The DU engineering division says the yearly maintenance cost of a lime concrete structure

is rather low. Proper maintenance could easily save the building from falling into ruin, said Ameer Hossain, DU chief engineer. "Willingness to preserve our heritage is enough."

"The maintenance cost is 2.5 percent of the total construction cost as per government rules," Hossain said.

"We need Tk 10 crore for maintenance and additional funds for repair of run-down structures," he said.

"I submitted a proposal to the university syndicate asking the government to allocate special funds for renovation and maintenance of Curzon Hall," he said adding the highest body of the university approved his proposal but the funds have not come in yet.

DU Vice-Chancellor Professor SMA Faiz said the university would do whatever possible on suggestions and recommendations from deans of sciences.



A RESTAURANT WITH A DIFFERENCE

Tommy Miah, the master chef popularly known as 'Curry King', has finally launched his 'Bangla Fusion Cuisine' at the Heritage Restaurant at Gulshan-2 yesterday. Decorated with paintings, photographs, terracotta and other works by the local artists, Heritage promises to offer a 'unique blending' of the taste of East and West. Besides the 'signature dishes' by Tommy, there is also a special event--artist Jamal Ahmed's 'Buriganga River Series' that depicts all the major historical sites of Dhaka on the bank of the river.

