Bandar gets Rupali Bank

Finally, the government approved the proposal to sell out its remaining 26 percent shares in Rupali Bank to Saudi Prince Bandar for $128 million last week, which would give him 93 percent ownership of the state-owned bank.

For quite a while now, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been pushing long for the privatisation of all four state-owned banks. The other National Commercial Banks (NCBs), namely, Sonali, Janata and Agrani were corporatised by the caretaker government as well.

Earlier, the Saudi prince had bought 67 percent shares of the bank from the BNP-led coalition government. According to the Privatisation Commission proposal, Prince Bandar was given the nod because his offer of $128 million was considered the highest after several analyses by the commission to estimate the bank's market value. The commission estimates that the market price for each Rupali Bank share is Tk 1800, whereas Prince Bandar is paying Tk 2,670 per share.

The Saudi prince plans on investing $150 million to improve the bank's condition over three years, such as -- developing its infrastructure and human resources, expanding foreign branches etc, the government felt that it would have to share an unequal burden of the investment comparing its minority share in the bank. The prince also plans to purchase helicopters and several other technologically advanced vehicles for improved monitoring and management of bank affairs. About $55 million will be spent on developing the information technology (IT) and telecommunications of the bank, while $33 million would be spent to improve the bank's infrastructure.



any official statement in this regard.

The joint forces also arrested BNP leader and former forest and environment minister Tariqul Islam, and another former lawmaker of the party Rashiduzzaman Millat from their houses the following day.

Obviously the drive intends to show that it means business by catching the 'big fish' and making no distinction between parties. In the past although successful governments have arrested individuals on charges of corruption, usually they were rival politicians.

The only exception to the rule was former military ruler HM Ershad who served time in jail for corruption.

All this seems to be in line with the Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed's declaration, during his January 21 address to the nation, that tough actions would be taken in a methodical way, to curb corruption. The Chief Advisor said that pervasive corruption and plundering of national wealth by a handful of dishonest people pushed the national economy, society and politics into a disastrous state.

The caretaker government has announced recently that the crackdown on corrupt individuals would continue irrespective of their positions in the society or in political parties.

The crackdown has been seen as a welcome move by most people - many want public trials of the detainees. We can only hope that they are tried under the rule of law and punished according to the extent of their crimes.