

# Corruption involving \$ 45m in lease on aircraft in five years

TIB study on Biman reveals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts and civil society members at a roundtable yesterday called on the government to publish the list of 'godfathers' and their accomplices responsible for massive corruption and irregularities in Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

Corruption involving 45 million dollars took place only in the process of taking up lease on aircraft in the last five years, according to a study report presented at the discussion.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) conducted the study titled 'Biman Bangladesh Airlines: A Diagnostic Study'.

The study also said the government has turned the Biman into a public limited company without following the rules and regulations.

No audit has been done or no assessment of the assets and liabilities of Biman has been made before making it a public limited company, it added.

The study also identified some factors such as political interference, massive corruption, lack of accountability of the Biman chairman and dual policy (treating the organisation as service-oriented and also as commercial-oriented) as the reasons behind

the present bad shape of Biman.

Moreover, poor passenger service and failure to maintain schedule are also major problems facing the Biman, the study added.

TIB organised the roundtable titled 'Bangladesh Biman: Problems and the way out' at the National Press Club in the city, with its President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad in the chair.

In its study, the TIB recommended eliminating the prevailing 'dual policy' in Biman's operational structure and not appointing any bureaucrats as the chairman of the Biman's board of directors.

The speakers at the discussion wondered why Biman has failed to make profit as there are some 70 lakh captive passengers in the country.

CEO and Managing Director of Biman Dr MA Momen said the extent of corruption in Biman is actually much higher than what the TIB has revealed in its study.

He criticised the former Biman bosses, including ministers, for ruining the organisation through political intervention and resorting to various irregularities.

'Biman's policy regarding purchase and others issues was friendly towards contractors and suppliers,' he said, adding, 'We will have to identify

godfathers and their accomplices who are responsible for the present situation.'

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said Biman would be able to make profit within a short time, if it can get rid of corruption.

Biman will have to enhance its efficiency and competitiveness as an organisation, he said, adding that Biman should start its new journey as a public limited company with zero liability.

Media researcher Muhammad Jahangir demanded punishment to the villains responsible for corruption and irregularities in Biman.

Former president of Biman Airlines Pilots' Association Nasimul Haque said that Biman MD should have absolute authority to run the organisation.

He also suggested abolishing the Biman's board of directors, saying that 'This body is good for nothing.'

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman, former secretary Abul Kalam Azad, former lawmaker Col (retd) Faruk Khan, former secretary Mohiuddin Ahmed, Captain Masud and Secretary General of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh Maulana Eyaqub Sharafat also spoke.

Another 584 retrenched workers of closed Peoples Jute Mills received their arrears yesterday.

Earlier 650 out of 3,100 laid off workers took arrears on Tuesday, the first day of the payment of arrears.

Fazlur Rahman, joint secretary of the ministry of jute, Mosharaf Hossain, director of the BJMC, Abu Taher, general manager (quality control), and Habibur Rahman, project director of the closed jute mill, were present during the payment.

Meanwhile, payments in cheques have created mixed reaction among the workers, said Abdur Rahman, publicity secretary of Khulna regional committee of Patkai Sangram Parishad.

The BJMC director said workers are given cheques to check corruption during payment.

He said at least a week is required to complete the payment of dues to all retrenched workers.

A total of Tk 96.83 crore would be given to the workers and employees of the closed jute mill as their arrear salary, bonus, lay off benefit, gratuity and provident fund, said the project director of the jute mill.

According to the CHT peace accord, the hill district councils should be responsible for the maintenance of security, land management and supervision and coordination of all development activities, but it remains only in paper, he added.

Prof Mesbah Kamal said there should be a demarcation of duties between the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) affairs ministry and other ministries and administrative bodies and the hill district council and regional council.

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Maj Gen (Rtd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury Bir Bikram, Prof Hayat Mamud, Dr Badiul Alam Majumder and Dr FRAI Siddique also spoke.

He also stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between the local government bodies and the central government for institutionalising democracy.

Bangladesh Adhivesi Andolok organised the meeting on 'Obstacles to the decentralisation of government Sharing experiences from plain land and Chittagong Hill Tracts' at the Biman auditorium in the city.

Dr Akbar Ali Khan observed that the obstacles facing the local government bodies in the plain land are similar to those in the hill districts.

The successive democratic governments have, in fact, failed to understand the spirit of democracy, he said, adding that in this form of governance, the elected representatives should ensure the participation of grassroots people in the governance process, but the people suffered exclusion in all those years.

He also emphasised the need to integrate the minority and indige-

nous people into the mainstream.

He lamented that though the government enacts laws, it is reluctant to implement those. 'The lack of willingness to enforce laws is a major obstacle to strengthening democracy,' he added.

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