

Sonali board refuses

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members even raised question whether there was laxity on the part of the Bangladesh Bank in detecting the Tk 3,606-crore scam, an official of Sonali Bank said.

The meeting, presided over by bank Chairman Quazi Baharul Islam, blamed a section of dishonest officials of the bank for the embezzlement by Hall-Mark Group and five other companies from the bank's Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch.

All members of the board and the top officials of the bank were present at the meeting.

Kashem Humayun, a director of Sonali Bank, however, said the central bank was not criticised at the AGM.

He said the board put the blame on a number of bank officials, and gave more emphasis on realising the money.

A finance ministry representative, who attended the meeting, said the government devised a strategy to recover the loan.

The bank management told the AGM that Hall-Mark had already sent documents to Sonali Bank about mortgaging 46 acres of land

against the loan. The Group has also proposed to mortgage another 13 acres.

The group has claimed the mortgage will cover about Tk 2,000 crore of the Tk 2,686 crore it has taken in loan.

But Sonali Bank in its primary evaluation estimated the land price at Tk 600 crore, said an official.

Contacted, a central bank official said there had been no laxity in Bangladesh Bank's supervision. The government can investigate whether there had been any negligence by the Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank usually inspects bank branches once a year if the branches lend 80 percent of the total credit of the bank.

As per rules, the Ruposhi Bangla branch does not come under the purview of the yearly inspection, the BB official added, requesting anonymity.

The BB in its 2010 inspection found that Sonali Bank had an outstanding loan of Tk 55 crore. The inspection revealed irregularities in giving loans to Hall-Mark Group.

Sonali Bank was informed about the irregularities at the time. In reply, the bank said steps were

being taken to address the issue, said the central bank official.

He added the BB made fresh inspection in the branch in April this year over allegations that the bank was reluctant to pay acceptance bill.

The primary investigation found that the branch gave Tk 555-crore in loan to Hall-Mark, which is much higher than the group got in 2010.

The detailed investigation found that Tk 3,606 crore was lent through irregularities.

No law made

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in any court in respect of anything said, or any votes cast, by them in parliament or in any committees thereof.

And subject to Article 78, the House is supposed to enact a law delineating the privileges of the Jatiya Sangsad, its committees and members.

In the last four decades, the House has passed over 1,100 laws but could not enact a law in light of Article 78.

"We made several attempts to have an act determining the privileges. But every time the moves fell through," said the veteran Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta.

Workers Party chief Rashed Khan Menon, MP, said the executive wing of the state remains indifferent when it comes to laying down a law on the privileges. "It is a major weakness in the system of our parliamentary democracy."

Arguing the need for the formulation of the privileges act, Suranjit, a former railway minister, said parliament could not function without privileges and so parliaments all over the world had privileges.

"MPs cannot perform freely without privileges. Privileges here do not mean purchasing duty-free cars or holding red passports," he observed.

Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chunnun said the privileges act was a must, and his party would raise the issue in the House.

It may be pointed out that soon after liberation, the government, then headed by Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, issued the Constituent Assembly Order, 1972, determining the privileges of members of the then assembly.

But once the constitution had been framed, the Constituent Assembly Order was repealed. And Article 78 of the constitution speaks of the enactment of a new law to determine the privileges of the House, its members and committees.

Information available says that in 1980, during the tenure of the second parliament, the then government moved to enact a law to determine the privileges of MPs. The Members of Parliament (Exemption from Preventive Detention) Bill, 1980, was placed in parliament on June 3, 1980.

The bill was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry for scrutiny and submission of a report to the House. But the committee did not come up with the scrutiny report during the tenure of the second parliament, and the bill was not passed.

Before the country's independence, in the Pakistan era, members of the national and provincial assemblies enjoyed some privileges under the Members of the National Assembly (Exemption from Preventive Detention and Personal Appearance) Ordinance, 1963, and the East Pakistan Assembly Members' Privileges Act, 1965.

According to the law, no member of the national assembly could be detained under any law relating to preventive detention during its session and for a period of 14 days before and 14 days after its session.

Members of the national and provincial assemblies would not be required to appear in person in any civil or revenue court or before any election tribunal during their sessions and for a certain period before and after that, according to the laws.



A combo photo shows Railways Minister Obaidul Quader almost falling on the platform, when he slips on the doorstep of his saloon car when the train he is aboard starts to move. And he escapes injury as people get hold of him in time. Quader was travelling to the capital from Lalmonirhat by an intercity express that stopped at Gaibandha station for a short break. The incident occurred when the minister, standing on the steps, was talking to his party men and locals.

27 banks under BB, ACC scanner

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purchase and acceptance bills issued between 2010 and May this year, the period of the Tk 3,606 crore swindle.

Sources said Mir Md Zainul Abedin Shebly, a deputy director of the commission, last month wrote to the managing directors and chief executives of the banks for the papers.

"Some of the banks have already provided us with the documents," said an ACC official, preferring not to be named.

According to the anti-graft body, some clients of the 27 banks have banking records with money illegally borrowed from the Ruposhi Bangla branch by Hall-Mark Group and five other companies.

The banks include state-owned Sonali, Janata, Agrani, Rupali and BASIC banks.

The other twenty-two banks are Shahjalal Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, Mercantile Bank, National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, United Commercial Bank, One Bank, Al Arafah Islami Bank, Jamuna Bank, IFIC, City Bank, Uttara Bank, Prime Bank, State Bank of India, National Bank of Pakistan, Bank Al Falah, Premier Bank, National Bank Ltd, Mutual Trust Bank, BRAC Bank, Islami Bank, Exim Bank and Southeast Bank.

A top Sonali Bank official said soon after the Ruposhi Bangla branch lent a huge sum of money to Hall-Mark, it was detected that a number of foreign and local banks had been demanding money from Sonali Bank against acceptance bills.

An issuance of these acceptance letters means the branch confirmed with the 27 banks that its client

Hall-Mark and five other companies had received due supplies from the clients of some branches of those banks against letters of credit (LC) opened earlier, sources said.

And, the branch would pay the money of the delivered goods to Hall-Mark and others within the next 30 days of issuing the acceptance letters.

Usually, business clients of the banks do not wait 30 days for the payment of their delivered goods; they want cash as quickly as possible. So they propose their banks to purchase the acceptance letter.

According to banking provisions, banks give their clients 75 percent of the total amount of acceptance letters, a procedure called purchasing "inland bill" of own clients in exchange of an interest rate.

When a bank transfers the payment after 30 days of issuing their acceptance letters, the bank at the receiving end pays the rest -- 25 percent -- to their client who earlier had sold out the acceptance letter.

The ACC official, on condition of anonymity, said as the Ruposhi Bangla branch issued many such acceptance letters to some branches of 27 banks, the commission decided to look into the matter.

Since May, the branch has already paid \$111 million (more than Tk 800 crore) against foreign bills it had accepted or purchased.

But, against the inland bills purchases, the 27 banks have been demanding money, which the branch is yet to pay, the official said.

A BB official said the central bank had received complaints from different banks that Sonali Bank was not paying their dues

against local export bills.

So far, 59 branches of those banks have claimed their dues against the bills. The central bank will investigate whether officials of those branches were involved in any anomaly.

A BB official said they had already inquired into some of the branches and found the involvement of state-run Janata Bank and Agrani Bank in the scam. Detailed investigation is going on in other branches.

In one case, the Janata Bank corporate branch opened two accounts in the name of two companies. For both the accounts, Tanvir Mahmud, managing director of Hall-Mark Group, was the introducer.

A central bank official said funds were transferred to the accounts of these companies, although the branch did not inspect whether the two companies existed.

The BB also carried out a special inspection on the activities of the principal branch of Agrani Bank.

The corresponding banks, which are making claims to the Ruposhi Bangla branch, have a responsibility to see whether the accounts of fake companies were opened with them, the official added.

Officials also believe private banks might have been used as platforms for the swindling.

Another central bank official said irregularities over purchase and acceptance of local and foreign bills took place inside branches, banks and with other banks.

And irregularities were behind a number of major scams in the banking sector in the country.

The official said the central bank was investi-

It's torturous

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"I am unwell. But I have been facing cross-examination day after day. It is torturous to me. It seems I have committed a big offence by appearing (before the tribunal) to give testimony," commented Shahriar during cross-examination.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir with members Justice Obaidul Hassan and Judge M Shahinur Islam recorded the cross-examination of Shahriar, the first prosecution witness in the case against the Jamaat secretary general.

Mizanul yesterday cross-examined the 62-year-old eminent journalist for one and a half hours and asked him around 50 questions, mostly on a violent attack on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Lahore in Pakistan in 1953.

When Mizanul sought adjournment of the case at 12:15pm for his "physical illness", Judge Shahinur Islam asked him, "How much time do you need [to complete the cross-examination]?"

"I would take at least two more sessions," replied Mizanul.

At this point, Shahriar Kabir, executive president of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, made the comment expressing his dissatisfaction.

The tribunal asked the defence to complete his cross-examination within next two sessions, and adjourned the proceedings until September 9.

The tribunal used to record the cross-examination of Shahriar in the first session, which stretches between 10:30am and 1:00pm, due to his physical condition.

Earlier on August 26 during his two-hour-and-forty-minute testimony, Shahriar appealed to the tribunal to try Jamaat and its associate bodies alongside its top leaders for what he said was their crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

On August 30, the defence cross-examined Shahriar for two and a quarter hours. They cross-examined him again on September 2 for another two hours and then again on September 5 for two and a half hours.

The defence has so far asked him around 250 questions in 8:15 hours on the four occasions of cross-examination.

Shahriar was scheduled to be cross-examined on September 4 too, but the tribunal adjourned the proceeding following the defence's plea.

Relying to a question yesterday, Shahriar said he never believes in military rule or military court and was against any trial beyond the Constitution.

"But it is the reality that we had to comply with many decisions taken by the military government in the then Pakistan and Bangladesh too," he observed.

Replying to questions, Shahriar said the 12-member National People's Inquiry Commission was formed in 1993 with poet Sufia Kamal as chairman and Barrister Shafique Ahmed as coordinator and he himself conducted investigations and helped prepare the commission's report.

While Mizanul Islam was asking several questions over the violent attack on Ahmadiyyas in Lahore, Prosecutor Muklesur Rahman Badal said, "This is not relevant to our case."

Opposing the prosecution's claim, Mizanul said "It is relevant because the witness talked about this [in his testimony]."

Mizanul asked over 30 questions about the attack and post-attack incidents. On several occasions, the tribunal asked the defence to ask relevant questions and the prosecution witness to give relevant answers.

Prosecutor Badal later told The Daily Star the defence were conducting "lengthy cross-examination as part of their strategy to delay the case proceeding". During the cross-examination, they intentionally asked many questions which were not relevant, he added.

Refuting the allegations, defence counsel Mizanul Islam said they were cross-examining the prosecution witness within the jurisdiction of law.

Replying to a question about Shahriar Kabir's comment, the defence counsel said, "Allegation of torturing him [Shahriar Kabir] is totally baseless."

On June 21, the tribunal framed seven charges against Mojaheed in connection with murder, genocide, and hatching conspiracy to kill intellectuals during the War.

Meanwhile, the tribunal recorded cross-examination of Md Hasanuzzaman, sixth prosecution witness in war crimes case against another Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

In his testimony on September 3, Hasanuzzaman, elder brother of martyred Badiuzzaman, said Jamaat leader Kamaruzzaman and his accomplices abducted his brother, who was tortured at a military camp in Sherpur and was later shot dead on June 30, 1971.

Hasanuzzaman is set to face cross-examination again on September 9.

On June 4, the tribunal indicted Kamaruzzaman with seven charges in connection with crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

2 advisers talk Teesta, Tipai with Indian ministers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Teesta river water-sharing, Tipaimukh power project and implementation of land boundary accord were among a range of bilateral issues which figured in discussions between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's advisers and four federal Indian ministers here yesterday.

Cooperation in power sector and security also figured when the advisers Gowher Rizvi and Mashhur Rahman met Indian Power Minister M Veerappa Moily

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CONTEMPT PLEA Matia asked to explain by Sept 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday directed Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury to explain her position by September 19 on the contempt of court petition filed against her by war crimes accused Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

It, however, exempted Matia from physically attending the court.

Moving the petition filed on August 29, defence counsel of Kamaruzzaman Ehsan A Siddiqi appealed to the tribunal to begin contempt proceedings against her for allegedly making statements disrespecting the courts set up to try crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Kamaruzzaman is now facing seven charges of murder and torture of unarmed civilians in Sherpur district committed during the war.

Awami League presidium member Matia visited Sherpur, the Jamaat leader's home district, on August 7 and 8 and made several statements that "constituted contempt of the honourable tribunal," Ehsan said.

Referring to a report of the Daily Naya Diganta, based on information from Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, he quoted Matia as saying on August 7 in Nalitabari of Sherpur that, "Those who would testify in favour of war criminals would be identified and a resistance movement would be waged against them in the locality."

According to another report of online news portal Barta24.net, Matia the following day at a programme in the same district said, "No witness giving evidence in favour of Kamaruzzaman would be able to return to his/her home as he/she would be beaten up by the public."

Such threats had been issued to deter defence witnesses from appearing before the tribunals and that was a clear obstruction in the trial process and interference in the administration of justice, Ehsan said.

Later, the three-member tribunal headed by Chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir asked Matia to give an explanation, if she had any, by September 19 and said it would hold a further hearing on the petition that day.

Earlier on August 5, Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah filed a similar petition against Deputy Leader of parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury with the second war crimes tribunal. And the court on August 27 asked the Awami League leader to explain her position by September 10.

Victorious

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three wickets each.

The Bangladesh women took the field with a target of only 76 runs which was achieved in a rather risky manner, for the loss of eight wickets. The win puts Bangladesh 1-0 up in the series with the second ODI to be played today from 9:30am at the same venue.