

CORRUPTION IN BANKS

TIB calls for forming expert committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday called for formation of an expert committee to combat irregularities, corruption and risks in the banking sector.

The anti-graft body expressed grave concern over what it called an anarchy and collusion of fraudsters in the sector.

TIB Executive Director Iftekaruzzaman in a press statement said the committee should be formed of independent and impartial individuals.

He urged the government to prepare and implement a complete and time-befitting guidelines based on the committee's recommendations.

There is no alternative for the government, especially Bangladesh Bank, to solving the crisis and bringing good governance to the sector, he said.

A section of people in the authorities

took ad hoc measures to stop unbridled forgery, corruption and institutionalisation of defaults on loans.

By ignoring the actual problems and showing a lack of foresight, they created a dip in confidence and anarchy unprecedented in the banking sector.

Although the BB took some steps in the wake of crises in the highly controversial Farmers and NRBC banks, it failed to unearth the specific causes behind the irregularities and ensure punishment for those responsible.

That is why the irregularities became unbridled, dipping the depositors' confidence, he said.

The TIB statement said the risk of institutionalising an uncontrolled and non-transparent dynasty has arisen in the banking sector through a recent amendment to the company act.

Lawlessness in the sector will not

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600 KLIA staffers transferred

Some suspected of trafficking Bangladeshis

THE STAR, Putrajaya

Some 600 Immigration staffers have been transferred out of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) station after some of them were suspected of being involved in the smuggling in of Bangladeshis.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said of the number, only a handful was involved with syndicates that used their "immigration friends" to bring in more Bangladeshis into their country.

He, however, did not reveal the actual number of those transferred because of their suspected involvement with the syndicates.

The transfer of other officers is in accordance with the civil service rotation policy as stipulated in a government circular, Ahmad Zahid added.

He said that following the uncovering of the activities, the department took the immediate measure of transferring staff, pending investigations.

"I am pleased by how the director-general (Datuk Seri Mustafar Ali) is dealing with the issue. This handful of officers, who have been violating the laws and working with syndicates, will be dealt with. We do not

condone such acts.

"Let us not forget that thousands of other Immigration personnel are dedicated and efficient in their work," he said after chairing the committee on foreign workers and illegal immigrants yesterday.

Ahmad Zahid said as part of the ongoing probe, five more people, including two Immigration officers at KLIA, were arrested on Thursday to assist in investigations.

The others are civilians, including two foreigners.

This brings the total number of arrests to seven people.

"We have asked the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to help in the investigation. We do not tolerate this violation of the law as it involves national security," he said.

According to reports, four syndicates were behind the smuggling of Bangladeshi workers into the country via KLIA.

It is believed the syndicates are raking in RM5.2mil in profits annually by charging between RM15,000 and RM20,000 for each person to make it easier for them to bypass the authorities, including Immigration and the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka.

DNCC by-polls

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after a meeting at the Nirbachan Bhaban. Election schedule will be announced by mid-January, he added.

Helaluddin said as there were no legal complications in holding the by-polls, the commission decided to announce the election schedule in the second week of January.

By-polls to the mayoral post will be partisan, and elections to the councillor posts non-partisan.

On December 4, the Local Government Division issued a gazette, saying that the DNCC's mayoral post has been vacant since December 1 as Mayor Anisul Huq passed away.

According to the constitution, the by-polls have to be held within 90 days of a post becoming vacant.

Although political parties have not had any formal discussion on selecting mayoral candidates, many, while speaking at different programmes, expressed their interest in getting tickets from the ruling Awami League or the BNP.

Insiders said the parties would take the mayoral polls seriously as it would be a crucial test of popularity ahead of the next parliamentary elections.

From the ruling AL, names of several family members of Anisul, Dhaka City North AL President AKM Rahmatullah, also the lawmaker in Dhaka-11, Dhaka-9 lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury, and former AL lawmaker Sarah Begum Kobori have come up for discussions.

Earlier, in a cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told her cabinet colleagues that her party should not be "emotional" in nominating candidates for this election. "Pick a genuine candidate for the polls without taking it emotionally."

"We are yet to formally discuss selection of party candidate. Time has not come to finalise the mayoral candidate, but the party will surely choose the best candidate," Abdur Razzak, AL presidium member, told

The Daily Star yesterday.

The BNP is likely to nominate Tabith Awal. BNP sources, however, said if the party goes to the polls under the banner of its alliance, it might consider Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andaleeb Rahman Partha as well.

"The party is yet to begin discussion on nominating a candidate. It will nominate the candidate only after the election schedule is announced," said Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, BNP standing committee member.

There was an uncertainty whether elections to the new wards would be held. But the EC yesterday made it clear.

"Tenure of the newly elected ward councillors will be that of the incumbent city corporation," said the acting EC secretary.

The LGRD and cooperatives ministry in July expanded the areas of the two city corporations by including 16 union councils. It formed 36 wards in the areas. The ministry asked the EC in August to hold elections to the new wards.

After the expansion, the number of wards in the DNCC rose to 54 from 36 while reserved seats for women rose to 18 from 12. The number of general wards in DSCC rose to 75 from 57 while reserved seats for women rose to 25 from 19.

Over 23.45 lakh city dwellers are expected to cast their votes to pick the mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation. In terms of population, the DNCC is the largest city corporation in the country.

In the last DNCC election on April 28, 2015, BNP-backed mayoral candidate Tabith Awal boycotted the polls on election day, alleging widespread rigging.

Assuming the office, the Awami League-led grand alliance government split Dhaka city corporation into two in November 2011.

The first election to the undivided DCC was held in January 1994.



A man carries a boy as he walks out of the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta, Pakistan, yesterday after the IS attack.

PHOTO: REUTERS

8 killed in IS attack on Pak church

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Balochistan provincial home minister Sarfraz Bugti said around 250 people normally attend the church on Sundays, but the congregation had swelled to around 400 because it was close to Christmas.

"God forbid, if the terrorists had succeeded in their plans more than 400 precious lives would have been at stake," tweeted the home minister.

An AFP reporter at the scene saw shattered pews, shoes and broken musical instruments littered across the blood-strewn floor of the church.

DEVASTATED Liaquat Masih, a member of the congregation, said he was heartbroken by the violence and feared for his life as the fire erupted between one attacker and police, who were later reinforced by paramilitaries and regular troops.

"I am devastated to see many of our dear ones dead and wounded today here in front of me," said Masih, 35.

Hours after the attack reports sur-

passed that a total of four attackers had been involved, with two escaping.

Senior police official Abdul Razzaq Cheema said investigators were analysing CCTV footage to check the claim and had launched a search for any further suspects.

Christians make up an estimated 1.6 percent of Pakistan's 200 million people and have long faced discrimination -- sidelined into lowly paid jobs and sometimes the target of trumped-up blasphemy charges.

Along with other religious minorities, the community has also been hit by Islamic militants over the years.

Following the latest attack, dozens of Christians protested in the north-western city of Peshawar and called on officials to protect religious minorities.

In 2013, 82 people were killed when suicide bombers targeted a church in the city.

And last year Lahore suffered one of Pakistan's deadliest attacks during the Easter season -- a suicide bomb in a park that killed more than 70 people

including many children.

The bombing was later claimed by the Jamaat ul Ahrar faction of the Pakistani Taliban.

Police and troops have been battling Islamist and nationalist insurgencies in mineral-rich Balochistan for more than a decade.

Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is the largest of the country's four provinces but its roughly seven million people have long argued they do not get a fair share of its vast gas and mineral wealth.

Efforts to promote peace and development have reduced the violence considerably in recent years.

The push includes continuing work on a mammoth Chinese infrastructure project -- the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor -- which will provide Beijing with a modern-day Silk Road to the Arabian Sea through Balochistan's deep-sea port of Gwadar.

AB Bank laundered Tk 165cr to UAE

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The BB also instructed it to immediately classify the laundered money as bad loans, and stop borrowing, investing and lending through the OBU.

This is the second instance of money laundering by the AB Bank in the last two years.

The BB last year detected that the bank laundered \$40.25 million (Tk 340 crore) to Singapore and the UAE through its OBU.

The AB Bank has been taking advantage of the existing rules on OBU, which allow a local bank to invest abroad without the central bank's prior approval.

"The AB Bank board cannot avoid the responsibility in this case, as the agreement was signed following its approval," the probe report says.

The local bank struck the deal with the PGF to invest \$20 million on condition that the firm will give it eight percent interest and invest \$80 million in it within 95 days of getting \$20 million.

Also, Cheng Bao's bank account with the ADCB was supposed to be controlled jointly by the AB Bank and the PGF. But nothing of this sort hap-

pened in the last three and a half years, mentions the report.

Besides, interest on the investment amounted to \$5.56 million as of October this year. As the interest is yet to be repatriated to Bangladesh, the BB report counted it as further laundering.

The total amount of laundered money, including \$25,000 as consultancy fee, now stands at \$24.89 million (Tk 206 crore).

The BB probe found that AB Bank Chairman Wahidul was named as a nominee of the bank's fund and a joint signatory of the account with the ADCB. He visited the UAE in February 2014 to complete the deal.

"Wahidul was well aware of the whole thing as he was a joint signatory of the account. He and AB Bank's ext- treasury chief Abu Hena collaboratively laundered the money to the UAE," cites the BB report.

The AB Bank raised the fund from the interbank foreign exchange market. It was supposed to take legal advice from both local and foreign law firms before making the investment. But it did not do so, mentions the report.

The private bank failed to show the

BB any formal offer letter from the PGF. It also could not show any article of association, business profile, registration certificate and memorandum of the PGF.

The PGF got a licence in November 2007 from Singapore's Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) to operate as a financial organisation. But the ACRA cancelled its registration in May last year, the BB team revealed.

Abdus Samad Khan, a Canadian citizen, signed the deal on behalf of the PGF. He was mentioned as PGF director in it but was referred to as a partner of the firm in another document.

BB officials said the AB Bank could not produce any document to prove that Cheng Bao was authorised to work as a SPV or a mediator.

Only a financial institution or an investment company is allowed to perform as SPV, but Cheng Bao is a trading company, they pointed out.

The BB wrote to the ACC on November 15, asking it to take legal action against those involved in the money laundering.

The ACC formed a probe body and summoned the persons involved,

Nahid blames

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Only four days ago, the question paper of class-I and IV in the school final examinations was allegedly leaked in Barguna Sadar, prompting the authorities concerned to postpone examinations in all 248 primary schools.

A day earlier, question papers of classes II-IV exams in Munshiganj were also leaked. The district deputy commissioner stopped the examinations of classes II-IV in all the 119 primary schools under the upazila.

During yesterday's meeting, the ACC delegation led by its commissioner Nasir Uddin Ahmed submitted its report along with a 39-points recommendation to the ministry.

In the report, the corruption watchdog said that government officers and staff are involved in every stage of the question paper, from preparation to distribution. It recommended employing honest and meritorious teachers in the preparation of questions, reducing the number of exam centres and keeping those in upazila towns.

After the meeting, the minister told reporters that the government took several measures to prevent the question leak from BG Press.

"When we hand over the questions to the teachers, we should feel safe. But that's not happening as a section of teachers leak the questions," Nahid said.

He further said the coaching centres allure the teachers into doing so by saying that the students of the particular centre would do well in the exams because of the leak and that the coaching centre's income would increase further for it.

He also said some teachers teach students in the coaching centres or at homes instead of giving lessons in the classroom. The more renowned the teachers are, the greater the chances of not teaching in the classroom, he added.

The minister said they are not taking any measures against coaching centres due to the lack of proper laws. Once the education act is passed, it would be possible to take steps, he added.

He also said the ACC's report is timely and most of the recommendations are under consideration. The ministry and the ACC would jointly remove the problems, Nahid added.

ACC Commissioner Nasir Uddin Ahmed yesterday pointed out the irregularities in the question leaks and in other areas while discussing different points of the report.

Still fraught with trafficking risks

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continue to report being deprived of food and forced to endure psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, says Human Rights Watch's World Report-2017. In some cases, such abuses amount to forced labour or trafficking. Some Bangladeshi domestic workers pay high recruitment fees and take out loans in order to migrate, the report says.

International Organisation for Migration says it helped at least 165 Bangladeshis as of May this year to return from Libya. Forty-three of them, who received IOM assistance in May, were detained by the Libyan authorities for not having valid travel documents, work permits or visas.

IOM has also reported that at least 8,687 Bangladeshi migrants used the deadly Mediterranean route to reach Europe till July this year.

Prof Tasneem Siddique, founder chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, said safe migration of a worker means the person is not subjected to any fraudulence, he or she gets expected salary and social protection at the destination country and leads a secured life on return home.

Although significant number of migrant workers is going abroad each year, little has been done for solving their problem involving their expected salary and social protection. At times it was seen that bilateral agreements were not "honoured" as workers were sent to other countries on "low quality" visas, she said.

The government is working to ensure the welfare of the workers through a dedicated ministry but it could do little to protect them from the clutches of illegal brokers, she told The Daily Star over phone.

"Time has come to formalise the 'broker system' and make the brokers accountable for fraudulence," said Prof Siddique.

The Transparency International Bangladesh has said around 90 percent of five lakh Bangladeshi male workers had to pay two to three times the usual migration cost in 2016 to obtain work visas for seven countries -- Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Singapore, Malaysia, the UAE and Bahrain.

Tanzimuddin Khan, a Dhaka University associate professor of International Relations, said the government needs to decentralise its migration process for the wellbeing of aspirant migrant workers at grassroots.

It also must make unscrupulous recruiting agencies accountable for misconduct.

Effective functioning of district-level employment and manpower offices is required while similar offices can be set up at upazilas, he said.

He pointed out that despite being a key lifeline to the country's economy, migrant workers are deprived of their due recognition largely because of their identity as "blue-collar and poorly-educated workers".

Only a handful of the troubled workers are getting help in making it to their home.

Migrants' welfare organisation Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) provided return and reintegration support to 382 migrant workers in 2016, with 188 incidents referred by the Bangladesh embassy in Lebanon followed by 177 incidents informed by the migrants' families at home.

Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia, local NGOs, and migrant communities in destination countries also referred some cases, says OKUP annual report, 2016.

Sickness and other problems, assistance to 45 families of deceased workers, shelter home service to 56 women migrant workers, some of whom returned with either physical or mental sickness, health support to 56 returnees, and legal support to 168 returnees, says the report.

Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, joint secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), said they were working to ensure decent migration of workers through holding awareness programmes and seminars regularly.

An organisation of over 1,000 recruiting agencies, Baira's one of the goals is to ensure migrant workers' transactions through proper banking channel so that they do not have to face any fraudulence and the migration process turns to be friendly, he said.

"Migrant workers have to be aware as well, as Baira alone cannot ensure their wellbeing," he added.

This correspondent yesterday called BMET Director General Salim Reza, and Nomita Halder, acting secretary, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, but could not reach them for comments on the issue.