

GHOST PURCHASES

Auditing authority finds CAAB spent crores buying equipment that has no proper record

RASHIDUL HASAN

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has found several "ghost equipment" purchases, worth several crore taka, made by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

In its audit report, CAG has revealed gross irregularities and corruption involving around Tk 25 crore in at least three cases of purchasing equipment, which include computer accessories and furniture for CAAB.

The auditing authority said in reality, the body did not buy the equipment at all, as it was never registered in stock.

It also identified gross anomalies while auditing CAAB's financial accounts for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 fiscal, and different departments under the organisation.

Regarding the first case, CAG's annual report said CAAB's four departments bought equipment for Tk 6.83 crore, but it was not registered in stock.

Describing the irregularities, the auditing authority said through analysing different bill vouchers and documents of executive engineer, civil department 2 and 3, and executive engineer, E/M department 2 and 3, it was found that there was no account of machinery, computer equipment and furniture purchased by the departments.

The four departments in 57 bills showed Tk 6.83 crore as the cost of those items.

About the anomalies, CAG said CAAB showed the expenditure without preserving the stock register of the equipment, which violates general financial rules.

According to the rules, an entry in the stock register in case of purchasing goods is a must. "But in this case, no such information was found," CAG said in the audit report.

In response to CAG's query, the CAAB said it will reply to the auditing authority after analysing the relevant documents. But CAG mentioned that it has raised the questions by analysing the very same documents.

Regarding the second case, CAG said after evaluating bill vouchers and documents of superintendent engineer, E/M circle, it found that equipment worth Tk 1.40 crore was provided to the airport and civil aviation training centre. But no account of such purchases was available at the offices concerned.

The auditing authority said it seems that CAAB did not buy the equipment at all.

Describing the anomalies, CAG said according to the general financial rules, purchased goods have to be received after

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A group of youngsters are in the middle of an exciting match of football as the weekend begins, taking a break from their regular life. This has become a routine for the spirited boys, since they are seen having a match almost every weekend at Suhrawardy Udyan. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Fourth death anniversary of Golam Sarwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Today is the fourth death anniversary of veteran journalist and freedom fighter Golam Sarwar.

Sarwar died of old-age complications at a Singapore hospital in 2018 at the age of 75.

He was the editor of Bangla daily Samakal and founding president of Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council).

Commemorating Sarwar, journalists and employees of Samakal will offer floral wreaths at his grave at Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard in the capital's Mirpur at 11:00am.

Besides, prayers will be offered at his grave for the salvation of his departed soul.

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Introduce state fund, insurance policy
BLAST urges for victims of road accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) yesterday called for ensuring accountability for road accidents and justice for affected people and their families.

In a statement, the rights group urged for introducing an effective insurance policy for accident victims and creating a state fund to sufficiently compensate them.

BLAST made the demands commemorating the anniversary of a road accident that took lives of internationally acclaimed filmmaker Tareque Masud and cinematographer Ashfaque Munier Mishuk on August 13, 2011.

BLAST praised the government for some positive steps over the years, like formulating Road Transport Act-2018, but simultaneously said many affected people and their families are yet to get justice.

The road transport act has been formulated to ensure safety of people on roads, but there is no proper enforcement of it, the rights group said.

Moreover, a clause of the law refers to creating a fund to compensate affected people, but that has not been done, it added.

Of 'tantrism' and trickery

Inside the world of cons created by fortune tellers

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

Faruk, a poultry dealer in Karwan Bazar who hails from Laxmipur, got married to his childhood sweetheart from the same village he used to live in. While they were staying in Dhaka, his wife got pregnant with their first child. But then, the couple had an altercation, and his wife went back to the village to stay with her parents.

Three months have passed, and she refused to return to him. That's when he saw a poster near his shop in Karwan Bazar, advertising one "Rayhan Tantrik", who claimed to be an expert in solving such conflicts, among other things, in 24 hours with his powers and expertise.

When Faruk phoned Rayhan, the tantrik, commonly known as a shaman, asked him to visit his chamber with Tk 15,000 for the arrangements. "Also, bring some of your wife's clothes," he told Faruk. "I need them to find out more about her."

So Faruk went to Chandina in Cumilla to see Rayhan. Inside the chamber, a perfect stage was set for the show to begin.

There were metal pots and lots of smoke inside the room, creating an atmosphere of mysticism. Noises were made in the background, which sounded otherworldly, thanks to the influence of the ambience created beforehand.

Twenty-two days had gone by after Rayhan Tantrik completed the ritual. Faruk's wife refused to come back still. He asked Rayhan for a refund but was refused. Rather, Rayhan told him that Faruk must have done something "wrong" and he should repeat the rituals again, which obviously meant spending more money.

Faruk and his wife eventually got separated.

Countless tantriks as such have been

scamming people forever in the country. Mysticism has been a crucial part of this culture, transcending boundaries of castes and religions. With years going by, their marketing has seen new dimensions, and so have their tricks. Every corner of every city has posters with striking visuals, advertising the brilliance of these tricksters. A tantrik usually has clients from all religious backgrounds.

"Bati Chalan" used to be a common tactic used by tantriks, which they would use to bring back stolen goods. Nowadays,

making predictions of one's lives and perils based on some basic Sherlockian deduction techniques, these con artists have gained quite a fanbase.

making predictions of one's lives and perils based on some basic Sherlockian deduction techniques, these con artists have gained quite a fanbase. And cashing in on the pre-existing superstitions of people, they have expanded more than ever in the last 10 years, especially after the pandemic, across the country -- like in Chattogram, Sylhet and Munshiganj.

Besides solving marital, financial, physical or emotional problems, these days many such tantriks are offering their "expertise" to solve the current load-shedding crisis too, which can be seen in

countless posters pasted on the city walls and pillars.

This prevalent culture has encouraged poverty-afflicted members of the Bede community -- who became even more vulnerable during and after the pandemic -- to join in on the scam as well.

This correspondent got a first-hand experience of this phenomenon when he visited three villages in Savar, known as Bedepolli, to look for one "Khoka Kabiraj" (78), who claims to have trained in "Tantra" in India's Kamrup Kamakhya for 12 years and has been in the profession for 45 years.

While looking for Khoka in Porabari village of Savar, several Bede women approached this correspondent. While one claimed to be Khoka's wife, others claimed to have the "power" as well. A shopkeeper couple claimed to be tantriks themselves, sitting inside an old shop, which worked as proof of their worsening economic status.

Upon reaching Khoka's tin-shed ancestral residence, it was known that he gets visits from six to seven clients a day and gets clients from India and Nepal as well. Arabic scriptures were hanging on the walls in a room that had a traditional "chouki" and chairs. Khoka appeared in simple clothes but was wearing three gold rings on his fingers and two gold chains on his neck.

He put on a show by making some random and vague assumptions about this correspondent's life and claimed to solve everything -- from domestics to loss in business and lawsuits. "You have recently faced a financial loss," said Khoka.

"Impressive. What else can you tell about me?" asked this correspondent.

"You also have a mole on the left side of your back," he replied, making a safe assumption.

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DEPT OF YOUTH DEV

Investigation finds promotions were illegal

SHARIFUL ISLAM

When the Department of Youth Development (DYD) last year prepared a list of 1,175 officers to be promoted to a higher position, Rafiqul Islam Sheikh's position was 497.

Rafiqul, an assistant upazila youth development officer (AYUDO) in Sirajganj, however, made it to the list of 112 successful AYUDOs elevated in November last year. The DYD gave all the promotees the current charge of upazila youth development officer (UYDO).

In their argument, DYD director general Azharul Islam Khan and former director (admin) Mokhlesur Rahman, who played a key role in picking and choosing the officers, had earlier claimed that previous service record and work efficiency were considered for the elevation.

The youth ministry probe committee found that some officers got the elevation though they faced departmental cases more than once and were even punished.

A departmental audit made the claim null and void as it unearthed Rafiqul's corruption instead. The audit, conducted by the DYD a few months after the elevation, found he embezzled Tk 1.62 lakh that he collected from borrowers while serving at Raiganj in Sirajganj.

The audit also found three other promotees to have misappropriated money. They are: Md Golam Faruq, Dipak Kumar Mandol and Ainul Islam Bhuiyan.

Faruq misappropriated Tk 2.38 lakh during his service in Sharsha in Jashore. He was elevated although his position on the list was 168th.

Dipak and Ainul embezzled Tk 3.80 lakh and Tk 1.47 lakh respectively while working in Jhenidah's Harinkunda and Mymensingh Sadar upazila.

The DYD framed charges against the four and suggested taking departmental actions.

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'Roads are not your ancestral property' Quader tells BNP about taking to the streets

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said BNP wants to turn the country into a failed state through a planned political approach.

Quader said this during a briefing at his residence in the morning.

Regarding opposition BNP leaders' order to their activists to occupy the streets, the AL leader said roads are not the ancestral property of anyone; the streets belong to the people. So, like in the past, if chaos is created again in the name of occupying roads, the people will give a befitting reply.

Stating that AL will soon be seen on the streets, Quader said BNP's shouting is just a tactic of hiding its failure.

He said BNP wants to come to power but is afraid to participate in the elections.

The AL general secretary advised the BNP leaders to forget about caretaker government, which he said is a settled issue and there is no chance for restoration of the system.

