

Framed by DB, two men have their names cleared at last

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two men, framed by the Detective Branch of police for the possession of fake bank notes, won the legal battle they have been fighting for six years to clear their names.

Judge Tahsin Iftekhar of the Metropolitan Special Tribunal-15 in Dhaka today acquitted Hasan Majumdar, manager of a city hotel, and Sohel Rana, chef of the same hotel, as charges brought against them could not be proved beyond doubt, said court sources.

During a raid at Hotel Bondhu in the capital's Paltan on November 6, 2016, plainclothes detectives detained the duo. The event was recorded in the hotel's security camera.

A sub-inspector of the DB then filed a case against them with Motijheel Police Station under the Special Powers Act.

The first information report, prepared by the police, depicted a completely different story.

According to this document, the DB arrested the duo in the Fakirapool area around 4:15pm on November 6, 2016, while they were fleeing with fake bank notes worth Tk 25 lakh.

Hasan, however, alleged that the false FIR was written because he refused to give the detectives Tk 3 lakh in bribe during the raid.

The next year, Sub-Inspector Dewan Uzzal Hossain, one of the officers who conducted the raid and also the investigation officer of the case, pressed charges against Hasan and Sohel.

After the incident, the victim Hasan and his brother Hossain Majumdar also filed several complaints against nine DB men with the Police Headquarters, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Prime Minister's Office and the home ministry, seeking a remedy.

Govt doing opposite of what's needed

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There is also no reason to assume all ADP expenditures are equally employment generating, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Expenditure austerity is needed particularly in domestically-financed ADP projects to contain domestic demand growth, Hussain said.

But that does not appear to be the case.

"This is strange because if the idea is to protect employment while alleviating pressure on foreign exchange reserves and inflation, it is the externally funded projects that should get high implementation priority. The proposed ADP revision is in the opposite direction."

In the current macroeconomic context, inflation reduction and alleviation of foreign exchange shortage have to be the top priority, according to Hussain.

Inflation averaged 8.76 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year, up from 5.7 percent a year earlier, according to data from the



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with deputy commissioners at Shapla Hall of the Prime Minister's Office after addressing the inaugural ceremony of DC conference as the chief guest yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

LEOPARD TANKS FOR UKRAINE

Germany promises swift answer

Encourages allies to start training Ukrainians; Kyiv purges officials in biggest shake-up of war

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday said it would decide "shortly" whether to authorise the export of powerful German-made Leopard battle tanks long sought by Kyiv and encouraged allies to start training Ukrainian forces to use them.

While Western nations have pledged ever more sophisticated military hardware in recent weeks to help Ukraine repel Russia's invasion, all eyes in Kyiv are on the battle tanks.

Berlin yesterday stopped short of granting permission for the transfer but underscored that a decision was imminent, provoking a defiant response from the Kremlin.

Poland also upped the ante by putting forward a formal application for the delivery of the German-made tanks from its stocks to Ukraine.

But in Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was battling a deepening corruption scandal within his government, sacking several officials over graft while others resigned.

Ukraine and several of its allies have been urging Germany for weeks to allow the delivery of the Leopards, but a US-led

meeting of Kyiv's allies in Germany last week failed to yield a decision.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius indicated that the moment of truth could be imminent, saying he had "expressly encouraged partner countries that have Leopard tanks that are ready for deployment to train Ukrainian forces on these tanks".

"I expect a decision to be made shortly," he added following talks with US Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Berlin.

Stoltenberg welcomed the "clear message" from the minister because it "will take some time" to ready the tanks and train Ukrainian soldiers to use them after a decision on their delivery.

"We must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster," Stoltenberg said, adding that he expected a decision by Berlin "soon".

Moscow shows no signs of changing course in its invasion, Stoltenberg added, noting that Russia has mobilised more than 200,000 troops and is acquiring new weapons from countries like North Korea or Iran.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the delivery of the tanks would "bring nothing good to the future relationship" between Berlin and Moscow.

"They will leave a lasting mark," he warned.

Under Germany's war weapons control rules, countries using German-made armaments are required to seek Berlin's permission if they wish to transfer them to a third party.

Poland, one of the loudest voices calling for permission to send Leopard tanks, said earlier this month it was ready to deliver 14 of them to Kyiv within the framework of an international coalition of countries.

Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak on Tuesday said the country had now sent in a formal request.

Confirming receipt, a German government spokesman said it would be examined "with necessary urgency".

Meanwhile, local media reports in Ukraine last week accused the ministry of having signed a deal at prices "two to three times higher" than current rates for basic foodstuffs.

Several officials resigned yesterday over the allegations, including a deputy defence minister, two deputy ministers of development of communities and territories, and a deputy minister of social policy.

Kamal unveils list of top 20

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The idea of publishing such a list of defaulters is good as they will be punished socially due to the disclosure, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"But the names of notorious habitual defaulters were absent from the list, so it has raised a question," he said.

The disclosure has not reflected the actual scenario of the defaulted loans, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

"I think those who might have faced closure of their businesses were revealed by the finance minister in parliament."

The politically-backed defaulters have rescheduled their defaulted loans under a central bank's relaxed rescheduling facility just before the pandemic, he said.

The reason being the borrowing is from the BB, which is always inflationary.

Foreign-funded projects and projects will fewer imports must be given priority, he said, adding that a bigger cut in the ADP budget would be beneficial for the economy.

year.

The central bank also allowed all borrowers in banks to avoid the default zone in 2020 even if they did not pay any instalment of their loans throughout the year.

Borrowers enjoyed the relaxed repayment facility until last year as the central bank allowed them to avoid being classified as a defaulter if they cleared 50 percent of their instalments payable in the final quarter of 2022.

"The habitual defaulters have bagged the advantages of the relaxed policies to avoid the default zone. But they should not be allowed to do so," said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

He suggested the government take strict measures against the defaulters to bring back discipline in the banking sector.

The relaxed rescheduling and loan repayment facilities have facilitated the delinquent borrowers to avoid the list, said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

He recommended the central bank take action against all defaulters to recover the classified loans.

Classified docs found

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contain sensitive or classified information interspersed throughout the records," Jacob wrote in the letter.

With agreement by the former vice president, FBI agents came to his Indiana home at 9:30pm on Jan. 19 to collect the documents stored in the safe, Jacob said.

Biden, whose documents dated from his time as vice president, and Trump, who resisted turning over the items, leading to an FBI raid, are both facing special counsel investigations by the Justice Department over improper handling of classified materials.

Sources familiar with the process say Pence's discovery of classified documents after the Trump and Biden controversies would suggest a more systemic problem related to classified material and the Presidential Records Act, which requires official records from the White House to be turned over to the National Archives at the end of an administration.

House passes bill

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person will get this benefit till death.

However, the amount of the premium is yet to be determined.

If a beneficiary dies before the age of 75, his or her nominee will get the pension for the remaining time.

According to the bill, there will be a government-appointed five-member national pension authority and also a 15-member governing body.

The finance minister will chair the governing body and it will hold at least three meetings every year.

The main office of the authority will be in Dhaka and its branches can be set up anywhere in the country.

Inclusion in this pension scheme will be voluntary unless the government issues a gazette for making it compulsory.

The deposited premium will be treated as an investment and will be exempt from taxation. The pension will also be exempted from tax.

According to the bill, the government may waive a portion of the fee for people with low incomes or who are insolvent.

There will be a universal pension fund to manage the deposited money. One or more scheduled banks will act as the banker of the fund.

Funds will be transferred through an electronic fund transfer system and for that, a centralised and automatic pension distribution structure will be formed.

A gazette notification will be issued for the inclusion of government, semi-

government, and autonomous bodies in this pension scheme.

Meanwhile, participating in the discussion in parliament, several opposition lawmakers criticised the scheme.

Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque said, "This is like a DPS scheme. There is a rumour that the government is in a fund crisis and is forced to take money from the people."

Jatiya Party MP Fakhrul Imam argued that the bill ran counter to the constitution by denying citizens the right to state support in times of need, such as unemployment, illness, disability, widowhood, and old age.

Another Jatiya Party MP, Kazi Firoz Rashid, said it was like keeping chickens near a fox.

"People will keep money in the bank and the bank will smuggle the money abroad. Banks have lost people's trust."

He also highlighted different news reports about money laundering and said that there is no one to see the matter.

Saying that loan defaulters are getting all the benefits, he said, "Those who are laundering money are being encouraged."

Responding to the criticisms, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said many discussions were held before placing this bill.

"The written comments submitted have been taken into consideration. The bill was also discussed in detail by the parliamentary committee."

Five sent to jail over fraudulence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A Dhaka court yesterday sent five men to jail on charges of fraudulence after they were arrested by Rab from the capital's Mirpur on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team arrested Shohel Rana, 37, Moinul Islam Mithu, 28, Hafizur Rahman, 40, Ibrahim, 30, and Al Amin, 23. The arrestees, who posed as government officials, were accused of promising jobs to unemployed individuals in exchange for money, said Major Alamgir Hossain, company commander of Rab 4 CPC-1.

Fake appointment letters, identity cards, and uniforms of different law enforcement agencies were recovered from their possession, he added.

A case was filed with Mirpur Model Police Station in this regard.

12 brick kilns fined Tk 69 lakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

The Department of Environment (DoE) yesterday fined 12 brick kilns in Jamalpur Sadar upazila a total of Tk 69 lakh for violating DoE guidelines.

The errant brick kilns were fined during multiple drives in different areas of the upazila led by Rubel Mahmud, executive magistrate and deputy director of Mymensingh DoE.

DoE also demolished Kakkoli Brick Kiln and ordered it to cease operations as they were found to burn plastic and wood instead of coal, said Masud Rana, assistant director of DoE's Jamalpur office.

The drives were part of an anti-pollution campaign to promote environmental conservation efforts.

One killed, two injured in Nepal quake

AFP, Kathmandu

One person was killed and two were injured after an earthquake struck western Nepal yesterday, a local official told AFP, with authorities still searching for damage.

The 5.6 magnitude quake's epicentre was in hilly Bajura district, 400 kilometres (250 miles) west of Kathmandu, according to the US Geological Survey.

The jolt hit at around 2:43 pm (0858 GMT), with tremors felt as far away as India's capital New Delhi, where buildings briefly shook.

One woman was reported dead, two people were injured and up to 40 houses damaged, district chief Pushkar Khadka told AFP.