

**FROM PAGE 1**

The reform commission recommends permanent attorney services for moving cases on behalf of the government at the apex and district courts without any political influence, and the formation of an independent investigation body in the criminal justice system. It also advocates swift justice for the common people at a minimum cost.

The government had constituted the eight-member reform commission, headed by former Appellate Division judge Justice Shah Abu Nayceem Mominir Rahman, on October 3 to propose necessary measures.

On December 11, the commission sent a copy of its preliminary report to Environment, Forest and Climate Change Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, who is coordinating all the reform commissions, to apprise her of their progress.

the commission believes that in order to make the appointment of the chief justice free from the influence of the executive authority, there should be a provision in the constitution to the effect that the president shall appoint the most senior judge in the Appellate Division as the chief justice.

"That is, the president cannot exercise his discretionary power or apply any other method in the appointment of the chief justice," the commission said in its report.

The report says that the number of judges in the Supreme Court remains an important issue in the smooth discharge of judicial and other duties. Therefore, it recommends certain provisions instead of article 94 (1) of the constitution. The proposed provisions stipulate that the "minimum number of judges in the Appellate Division shall be seven and more judges shall be appointed as required as per the requirements of the chief justice". The recommended provisions also stipulate that the "necessary number of judges shall be appointed in the High Court Division from time to time as per the requirements of the chief justice".

About the formation of the "Supreme Court Judges Appointment Commission", the reform commission states that, besides the chief justice, the other eight members will include two most senior Appellate Division judges, the two most senior judges of the High Court Division, one retired judge of the Supreme Court, the attorney general, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and another lawyer of the Supreme Court.

The opinion of the appointment commission will prevail in the appointment of SC judges.

The reform commission has already sent a draft ordinance on the matter, prepared in light of articles 95 (1) and (2) of the constitution, to the Law and Justice Division.

The appointment commission will invite applications from candidates with the prescribed qualifications, which the final report will elaborate on, the preliminary report says.

A shortlist of candidates will be prepared based on a review of applications, which

will be made public so that the people may send their objections or reservations. The shortlisted candidates will then be invited for an interview, following which the commission will select candidates through secret ballot after discussing suitability of the candidates. The president will then appoint the judges according to the recommendation of the commission within 15 days.

The proposed provisions state that the president may ask the appointment commission to reconsider nominees, stating reasons for doing so, but the commission will not be obligated to change its list. It may send back a modified list or the original one.

Currently, the president appoints judges of the Appellate Division and the High Court Division in consultation with the chief justice in line with the constitution.

The reform commission has held meetings and exchanged views with diverse stakeholders, including the chief justice, the law adviser and the attorney general, before making the preliminary report.

It also sat with the chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal; public prosecutors and government pleaders of Dhaka district; and representatives from Open Society Foundation, USA; Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association; Dhaka District Bar Association; Bangladesh Judicial Service Association; Bangladesh Judicial Employees Association; Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries; United Nations Development Programme; Japan International Cooperation Agency; American Department of Justice; Carter Center; National Bar Association; and Law and Justice Reform Forum.

Besides lawyer Tanim, the members of the reform commission are retired High Court judges Justice Emdadul Haque and Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli; former district and sessions judge and former registrar general of Bangladesh Supreme Court Syed Aminul Islam; former district and sessions judge Masdar Hossain; Dhaka University associate law professor Kazi Mahfuzaul Haque Supan; and a representative from students.

FROM PAGE 1

FBI confirmed the matter through their London representative and found evidence that serious financial irregularities and money laundering crimes had been committed there," the source said.

"Linda Samuels, Senior Trial Attorney of the Department of Justice (DOJ), contacted Special Agent La Private and found that \$300 million was deposited from Bangladesh to various bank accounts in the United States," the source added.

Earlier on December 17, the ACC decided to launch an investigation into allegations that Hasina, Joy, Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana, and Rehana's daughter Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker, embezzled Tk 80,000 crore from nine priority projects.

Speaking about this

case in a views exchange programme with journalists at the ACC headquarters yesterday, the commission's Chairman Mohammad Abdul Momen said, "Many of the things we know are true. We will provide more information when we have more data."

**ACC BOSS'S ASSETS**

In the meeting with reporters, ACC Chairman Momen revealed his wealth statement.

According to Momen, he owns a 1,500-square-foot apartment combining two 750-square-foot units at Bosila in the city's Mohammadpur. He is in the process of acquiring an additional 700 square feet there.

Together with his wife, he has a five-katha empty plot in Purbachal American City.

As a member of the BCS

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, the promotion ratio between administrative cadres and other cadres for the deputy secretary position is 3:1. However, the Public Administration Reform Commission recently proposed changing this ratio to 1:1, sparking dissatisfaction among administrative cadre officers.

The protesters voiced their concerns to Mokhles,

warning of potential legal action if their demands were not addressed. Mokheles assured the delegation that the commission would present reasonable recommendations to the government. He also emphasised that further discussions would be held to resolve any confusion over the matter. Meanwhile, officials from other cadres have announced a one-hour

**FROM PAGE 1**  
security for journalists. He said there should be a minimum floor wage for all journalists, ensuring fair compensation not just for those based in Dhaka but for professionals throughout the country.

"In many cases, particularly outside of Dhaka, a journalist wears three hats simultaneously – the hat of a journalist, the hat of an advertisement procurer and the hat of a salesperson. But a journalist should not engage in advertisement collection, because that opens the door to corruption," he said.

Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, also recommended replacing the journalists' wage board with a floor wage.

"Then this needs to be enforced strictly. If an organisation does not pay the journalists the minimum

wage, the organisation will not be allowed to exist," he said.

Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, the founder of Digitally Right, said, "The labour law needs to be strictly enforced so that journalists are paid duly and on time. If a media organisation is not financially viable and cannot pay its journalists, then it should be allowed to close down. Those who truly want to run a media business for the sake of doing journalism will then thrive."

"Most of the journalists in Bangladesh get less than Tk 10,000 per month. Local journalists often do not get paid at all. How do you expect the highest journalistic standards from journalists who are struggling to survive?" questioned journalist Masud Kamal.

They also spoke about the

**FROM PAGE 1**

Esse and Oris, investigations by both The Daily Star and NBR found.

Mohammad Fakhru'l Alam, head of the NBR investigation, submitted a 111-page report on his findings late last month.

Of the 20 firms making counterfeit cigarettes, Bijoy International Tobacco and Tara International Tobacco are by far the biggest, says the report submitted to NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan.

The firms — both owned by Tara Group — import raw materials by lying on documents and produce counterfeit cigarettes in their factories in Kishoreganj and Chakaria Upazila of Chattogram, says the report.

This newspaper previously found that counterfeit cigarettes made by these companies were sold in different parts of the country.

that the Tara Group was linked to at least 10 of them. The former education minister, a councillor, and his brother are involved in illegal cigarette distribution.”

He added that Bijoy's International Tobacco's factory in Chakaria was built on land owned by the three of them.

“We have found evidence of illegal cigarette production and marketing. We saw suspicious transactions at Tara Group's bank accounts. The former education minister used Premier University's bank accounts to receive his cuts.

"We recommend filing criminal and departmental cases against several individuals and organisations." Premier University's account with United Commercial Bank's Chattogram Medical College Branch received Tk 3 crore from an account of Tara Group with the same bank's Jubilee Road Branch on October 1 last year.

The CIC on October 23 this year wrote to the university's registrar seeking information about this transaction.

Four days later, Registrar Iftekhar Monir replied, "University Trustee Board Chairman Mohibul Hassan

Chowdhury withdrew Tk 3 crore in cash for development work of the university. However, he deposited the same amount of money from an account of Tara Group to the university's account as the work was not completed."

Monir also mentioned that Tara Group and the Premier University are not related.

When contacted, Monir said, "We have no additional comments other than what we have written [to the NBR]."

Liton and Nowfel had gone into hiding after the Awami League government



Administration Committee, Momen was allocated an 1.25-katha share of a 10-katha plot. He has not gained possession yet after receiving the allocation in 2007.

He had deposited Tk 75,000 for a RAJUK plot, but no resolution has been made until now. "For some reason, the government did not allocate it to me. I will apply again. Apart from this, I have no other immovable assets."

Momen's movable assets include 25 shelves filled with books of various sizes, including many valuable ones. He has furniture and electronic items worth around Tk 5 lakh.

He has a five-year savings certificate worth Tk 30 lakh and another three-monthly savings certificate worth Tk 20 lakh. He has

not withdrawn his General Provident Fund money, which amounts to Tk 17 lakh.

Answering to a journalist's question, Momen said, "It is our expectation that corrupt individuals are not spared. But our expectations are often not met for various reasons. Perhaps the cases we file are weak.

"While it's not appropriate to criticise the judiciary here, questions do arise about whether justice is served. However, holding the ACC solely responsible for ensuring justice would not be fair."

ACC Commissioner (Investigation) Mia Mohammad Ali Akbar Aziz said, "The ACC does not yet have its own prosecution bureau. During the 11th government, I was a deputy secretary in the law ministry.

A directive for establishing

strike across government offices today in opposition to the commission's proposal. They argue that promotions to deputy secretary should be based entirely on exams and merit, without considering what cadre an official belongs to.

"We want promotions to be solely merit-based. This government came to power through an anti-quota movement, and we don't want another

movement over this issue," said Muhammad Molfjir Rahman, a leader of the "Discrimination Eradication Council" representing 25 cadres.

An additional secretary, speaking on condition of anonymity, stated that a court ruling supports the 3:1 promotion ratio. The officer added that the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association, which represents deputy

failure of journalists' unions in upholding the rights of journalists.

The politicisation of unions interferes with their capacity to negotiate with the management of media organisations on behalf of journalists, said Abu Sayeed Khan, advisory editor of the Samakal. "Depoliticisation of unions is a tall order because journalists themselves are politicised."

"The unions used to work as a pressure group at one point, but they fail at their job now," said MA Aziz, former secretary general of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

Speakers at the dialogue stressed the need for accountability of the media in Bangladesh and the role of an independent Press Council that is not operated by government puppets.

They said that citizens have a right to seek redressal

for harm caused by predatory journalism.

"The Press Council is a dysfunctional and failed institution. We need to figure out how to enable the Press Council," said Masud Kamal.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of the Ganosambhati Odolan, said, "The Press Council must keep watch on whether standards of journalism are truly being upheld. The Council must be allowed quasi-judicial powers so that justice can be served."

Mahbub Morshed, managing director and chief editor of the state-run national news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, said that the Press Council must run like a civil court.

Professor SM Shameem Reza of Dhaka University's mass communication and journalism department stressed the need for a

commissioners from all 64 districts, would sue the commission for contempt of court if it violates this precedent.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association also protested the commission's recommendations. They argued that the proposed changes would fail to create a "people-oriented, efficient, impartial, and modern administration."

universal code of conduct for journalists and regulation in the industry using methods like accreditation.

Qadaruddin Shishir, editor of AFP Factcheck, said that it needs to be considered whether media houses intentionally spreading misinformation or disinformation can be taken into account without impeding the freedom of expression.

Zillur Rahman, executive director of CGS, said, "In the last few years, journalists have been harassed and the media has become a puppet to the government."

Matur Rahman Chowdhury, editor of the Daily Manabzamin, warned against excessive government intervention, saying that the fear of media houses being shut down and journalistic voices being silenced in the name of reforms cannot be discounted.