

SC bars three bank chiefs from leaving Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Sunday ordered placing of names on the Exit Control List (ECL) of presidents and chief executive officers of three banks allegedly involved in Rs35 billion suspicious transactions used in money laundering.

A three-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar, also summoned the CEOs and presidents of the Summit Bank, Sindh Bank and United Bank Limited (UBL) and others mentioned in the FIR registered by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) over money laundering charges even if they are in custody of the agency.

The names of the bankers would be placed on the ECL by the interior ministry so that they might not flee the country until the investigations were complete, the court ordered.

The FIA investigation has also revealed names of the beneficiaries of suspicious transactions, including those of former president Asif Ali Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur as members of the Zardari Pvt Ltd.

The court has taken suo motu notice of slowness and slackness on part of the FIA in conducting the investigation into fake accounts and fictitious transactions worth billions. These accounts were allegedly used for transactions of funds received through heavy bribes and kickbacks.

1. Zardari, Faryal among beneficiaries of Rs35bn suspicious transactions

Pakistan Stock Exchange chairman Hussain Lawai, a close aide to Mr Zardari, and co-accused Taha Raza, the corporate unit head of the Summit Bank, have already been arrested by the FIA.

The Supreme Court also asked senior officials of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to cooperate with the FIA and directed the inspector general of Sindh police to ensure the presence of the presidents and the CEOs of the banks and others who had been summoned in the court.

On a request by FIA director general Bashir Memon, the court ordered freezing of Rs7 billion deposited by the Summit Bank as its equity in the SBP.

The FIA chief told the court that the inquiry into the suspicious transactions was initiated in 2015 on a source report and, as a result 29 'benami' accounts were identified. Of these 16 were in the Summit bank, eight in the Sindh Bank and five in the UBL. Seven individuals were involved in suspicious transactions of Rs35bn, he added.

The chief justice said that when he was in Karachi recently, he got a clue that the Summit Bank was being merged with the Sindh Bank and he had to intervene by asking the SBP governor to stop the process.

The FIA DG regretted that the bankers were not providing required records to the agency.

Referring to the account of A-One International, Mr Memon said from this account Rs4.4bn was credited and routed during a short span of 10 months from March 6, 2015, to Jan 12, 2016.

According to the FIA investigation, the names of the creditors include M/s Bahria Town Karachi project and Zain Malik, Sujawal Agro Farms Pvt Ltd, Tando Allahyar Sugar Mills Pvt Ltd, Omni Pvt Ltd, Agro Farms Thatta Pvt Ltd, Alfa Zulu Company Pvt Ltd, Haji Mureed Akbar, Sher Muhammad Mugheri and Co, Sardar Muhammad Asharf D. Baloch Pvt Ltd, A-One International Pvt Ltd, Lucky International, Logistic Trading, Iqbal Metals, Royal International and Umair Associates.

According to FIA DG, the inquiry also revealed that funds were

transferred to different business entities from this account. The name of the beneficiaries include Summit Chairman Bank Nasser Abdullah Lootah, Zardari Group Pvt Ltd (Asif Zardari and Faryal Talpur etc), Ansari Sugar Mills Pvt Ltd (Anwar Majeed, Ali Kamal Majeed), Omni Polymer Packages Pvt Ltd (Abdul Ghani Majeed, Ali Kamal Majeed), Pak Ethanol Pvt Ltd (Mustafa Zulqarnain Majeed, Abdul Ghani Majeed), Chambar Sugar Mills Pvt Ltd (Anwar Majeed, Nimr Majeed), Agro Farms Thatta Pvt Ltd (Anwar Majeed, Nazli Majeed), Parthenon Pvt Ltd (Iqbal Khan Noori), A-One International, Lucky International, Logistic Trading, Royal International and Umair Associates.

The inquiry suggested that the one of the 29 accounts in the title of A-One International Pvt Ltd was opened in the name of Tariq Sultan by using his computerised national identity card. The account was used to park illegitimate funds for money laundering.

However, Tariq Sultan denied before FIA having opened the account.

According to the FIA DG, the investigation further revealed that Kiran Aman, the then operations manager of the Summit Bank, had admitted and verified forged signatures of the account holder as genuine with mala fide intention. Whereas Noreen Sultan, the then relations manager of the bank, had admitted the forged signature of the account holder on annexure for change of signature from the one found on the CNIC and Adeel Shah Rashidi, the then branch manager of the bank, had deliberately signed documents for approval of account opening though the bank record showed that the account belongs to Omni Group.

Mr Rashidi later disclosed that the documents had been sent to the corporate department of the bank for approval and Taha Raza sent back the documents with remarks "referred by Hussain Lawai" with a directive to open the account.

Hence, it was established that the bankers had fraudulently opened fake/forged accounts fulfilling the codal formalities, the FIA DG said. The investigations are still ongoing.

The case will again be taken up by the Supreme Court on July 12.