

IO issued notice for failing to file charge sheet against Sepa director ‘involved in Rs19m graft’

KARACHI: An anti-corruption court has issued a show-cause notice to an investigating officer for ‘failing’ to submit final charge sheet against a director of the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) and others booked for allegedly embezzling Rs19 million funds of the agency.

Irfan Ahmed Abbasi, the then director (administration and finance) along with other officials of Sepa, has been booked for alleged embezzlement of funds meant for establishing the agency’s district offices across the province.

Taking up the matter recently, the judge took serious notice of failure of IO Kazi Sharafuddin to submit the final charge sheet in the present case despite the lapse of 90 days for completion of the investigation after the submission of the interim charge sheet.

The IO requested for more time. However, the judge issued him a show-cause notice with the direction to submit the final investigation report against the suspects and fixed the matter on April 5.

Earlier, the IO filed an interim report on Dec 24, charge-sheeting Irfan Ahmed Abbasi and other unidentified officials in the environmental protection agency for allegedly embezzling the funds.

In the report, he concluded that in view of facts and evidence prima facie a case was made out against Irfan Abbasi and others under Sections 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servant, or by banker, merchant or agent), 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating), 471 (using as genuine a forged document) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code and Section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act-II, 1947.

According to the prosecution, in pursuance of the directives issued by a Supreme Court-appointed judicial commission on water and sanitation the provincial finance department had allocated funds amounting to Rs98m to Sepa in April 2017 to open its sub-offices in 10 major districts for protection, conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of environment of the province.

It further mentioned that mainly the funds were to be utilised for salaries of the staff to be appointed and procurement of equipment, rent for the office space and furniture for establishing the sub-offices in various districts of the province. However, an inquiry revealed that only three sub-offices were established while no appointments were made, it claimed.

The prosecution further said that the procurement of furniture and equipment was done in October 2017 with an amount of Rs14.56m, but the purchases were made “unplanned and without contingency plan”.

The purchased items, including furniture and equipment, had not been allocated further to the newly set up sub-offices, but dumped in store at head offices, it added.

Besides, it was mentioned that fake billing had surfaced, which was carried out to siphon off funds in the heads of petrol, travelling allowance and dearness allowance and rent of the non-existent offices.

The prosecution claimed that out of Rs98m allocations, an amount of Rs79m had lapsed due to non-appointment of staff to run the sub-offices.

The articles purchased with an amount of Rs14.56m had been dumped at the Sindh environmental protection agency's main office without further distribution to the sub-offices.

It further claimed that only three sub-offices could be established and there "was no plausible justification to the effect as to why the other offices were not established".

"Main perpetrator of embezzlement has been Irfan Abbasi, director, admin and finance (Sepa)," the FIR stated and further accused him of having "arranged, prepared and encashed the fake bills".

During an inquiry, it revealed that the defaulter Irfan Abbasi managed to get the bills passed against petrol, rent and TA/DA, based on forged signatures of an additional director (admin) of the agency. Further probe detected that almost all bills were claimed on the basis of fake and forged receipts, quotations and bills, it added.

The anti-graft watchdog mentioned that losses to the tune of Rs19m caused to the national exchequer had been proved beyond any reasonable doubt.

It stated that the DG Sepa conducted a departmental inquiry, wherein he categorically mentioned the commission of the alleged offences, adding that the gravity of the misconduct could be noticed from the fact that even uniforms were procured for the employees, who were yet to be recruited.

It said the whole process of procurement had been found managed and non-transparent, adding that although the bid was published in the leading dailies and the rules of the Sindh Public Procurement Act were followed, yet opportunity was exploited through controlled competition among three firms/vendors from Hyderabad and the contract for the items was given to one of them.

It showed that bid rigging had been done with ulterior motives through giving of bid documents to selected few only, stated the FIR adding that all procured stocks were shown in documents but upon intervention through an inquiry the accused managed a haphazard purchase of the stocks to be kept in the store for inspection.

"Organised offence has been committed for personal gains," it stated and alleged that Mr Abbasi, during an inquiry admitted to his guilt and showed voluntariness to return the amount worth Rs2 to Rs4m. However, he changed his mind afterwards, it added.

It further stated that the finance department had released Rs98m to the agency to set up its sub-offices in 10 districts in the first phase. "But, the misuse of funds is already started," the complainant stated in the FIR.

It further mentioned that in different heads a sum of Rs18.7m had been consumed.

The anti-graft watchdog after collecting sufficient documentary evidence recommended the matter to the anti-corruption committee-I (known as ACC-I) for registration of a case against Irfan Abbasi and others.

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