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Fugitive Afghan central bank chief: ready for execution if guilty

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The Afghan central bank chief who fled his country in June saying his life was in danger after uncovering irregularities has told German broadcaster ARD that he is ready to face execution if his accusers can prove he has committed any crimes.

Afghan officials want to question Abdul Qadeer Fitrat over alleged financial violations.

In an interview published Sunday on the broadcaster's website, Fitrat said he took his job in 2008 and was immediately forced to deal with cleaning up a bank that had been used as a personal piggy bank by people close to Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Any charges against him, he says, are payback for his attempts to reveal the crimes.

'If the president can find even one incriminatory signature by me or the central bank or even one written with the knowledge of the central bank, then I will stand ready for execution,' he told ARD.

Fitrat said Karzai's brother Mahmoud was one of many high-profile Afghans who had dipped into money held at Kabul Bank for private purposes. In Mahmoud Karzai's case, the money was allegedly lost when it was invested in Dubai property developments that went bust.

He also spoke of the Kabul Bank transferring millions of dollars to Karzai's political campaigns, to be spent on vehicles and media appearances.

The country's largest private lender handles the salaries of about 80 per cent of Afghanistan's civil servants. It nearly collapsed last year due to a run on deposits following the exposure of massive fraud.

Fitrat said he found extremely weak oversight in Afghanistan's banks when he took over at the central bank and immediately tried to start cleaning things up and seeking prosecutions for those who had mishandled money.

But he said he fled in June after hearing from 'believable sources' that his life was in danger.

'Donor countries have no reliable partners in Kabul,' he told ARD. 'There are honest ministers in the cabinet. But there are a lot of people surrounding them who misuse millions for themselves and their families.'

He dismissed the recent arrest of two Kabul Bank officials, noting that the central bank had requested their detention 10 months ago.

'These are the smallest fish. The big ones are never chased. That's why I accuse justice there of working very selectively.'