

# Freaky figures leave telecom graft case on fragile footing

ABU SAEED KHAN

Inconsistency between the charge sheet of the telecom graft case and the white paper on corruption is feared to diminish the merit of the case.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption last Thursday filed a graft case against finance and telecom ministers of the immediate-past Awami League government.

The then secretary, joint chief and research officer of the telecom ministry along with the then General Manager (Overseas), one Director, four Divisional Engineers and one Assistant Divisional Engineer of the BTTB have also been implicated in this case.

They have allegedly bypassed competitive bidding and violated the government's financial rules while awarding a US\$213 million contract to the China National Machinery Equipment Import and Export Corporation (CMEC) for installation of 2.16 lakh telephones in 58 district headquarters.

But the FIR substantially differs with the recently published white

paper on various corruption of the Awami League government. According to the white paper, the then telecom minister Mohammad Nasim visited China during May and June of 1997. Monwar Ali, the then director of the BTTB, was on the minister's entourage.

On May 30, 1997, Ali, at the instruction of Nasim, signed a memo-

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randum of understanding (MoU) with the CMEC for quick implementation of various telecom projects.

The white paper questioned the process of signing the MoU, as it should have followed an inter-ministerial meeting.

The white paper is also critical of bypassing finance and planning ministries before signing the MoU with the CMEC. The Bureau of Anti-corruption has ignored these vital issues in the graft case.

However, on June 8, 1998, the CMEC submitted a US\$ 223 million supplier's credit proposal to install 1.89 lakh telephones in Bangladesh.

The ECNEC approved this project on June 9, 1999 followed by the ERD and CMEC signing the supplier's credit agreement on June 30, 1999.

The BTTB negotiated and reduced \$10 million from the CMEC's quoted prices and added 27,000 lines. As a result, the project cost came down to \$213 million and the scope of work went up to 2.16 lakh telephones. The cabinet purchase committee approved it and the BTTB and the CMEC signed the contract on October 7, 1999.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption has implicated all the BTTB officials of this negotiation committee in this graft case. But the entire BTTB hierarchy of that period including the then secretary of the telecom ministry has been left out of this investigation.

The white paper is critical about the high price of CMEC's exchange equipment. It compared the CMEC's per line cost of \$188 with \$108 of Turkish joint venture of Canadian Nortel's. But the charge

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PHOTO: STAR

Empty pitchers and buckets are stacked up as wait for water stretches for hours at the WASA outlet in Beli Bagan area in Narayanganj yesterday.

## House talks MIG-29, frigate 'graft' issue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday heard a discussion on alleged grafts in the purchase of eight MIG-29 aircraft from Russia and a Korean frigate during the tenure of the immediate past Awami League government.

During the 40-minute discussion, the ruling BNP lawmakers accused the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and others of making money out of the state purchases and demanded their trial in a special court. They also demanded that a

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## Amnesty seeks neutral probe into 'torture' of Nasim, Alamgir

UNB, Dhaka

Amnesty International has expressed concern at the reported torture in custody of two opposition Awami League leaders, Bahauddin Nasim and Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

It appealed to the government for properly investigating by an independent body the alleged torture and bringing to justice any police officers or members of security agencies to be found to have done it.

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## 5 alleged robbers die as truck rams their vehicle in Tangail

UNB, Tangail

Five alleged gangsters were crushed under the wheels of a truck off the town in the early hours of yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the robbers were pounded inside a car they were riding as it was run over by a cow-laden truck they tried to block with their vehicle on the Tangail bypass of the Dhaka-North Bengal highway about 1 am.

Police said the truck rammed into the private car whose riders tried to block its way "to rob the truck."

All but one of the car passengers

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## Govt refutes Review report

STAR REPORT

The government yesterday protested the cover story of the Far Eastern Economic Review's April 4 issue headlined "Beware of Bangladesh" saying that the report was false and maliciously motivated to internationally tarnish the country's image.

A highly placed source in the foreign ministry said the government sent an official note to the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review in protest against the cover story that claimed that armed Islamic fundamentalist groups were leading a revolution in Bangladesh that could spell troubles for Asia and beyond.

The protest note said Bangladesh was declared as a role model for

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# Govt yet to nab top 23 terrorists

ABUL KALAM AZAD

Three months have passed since publication of the list of 23 most wanted criminals, and the government has not even managed to get all their photos, let alone catch anyone.

The Home Ministry has recently released posters containing photos and particulars of only 17 of the 23 most wanted criminals.

As per the Home Ministry's directive, a total of 1.4 lakh posters under two categories were printed by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Police have so far failed to arrest any of the listed terrorists.

A reward of Tk 1,00,000 has been announced for cooperation with the law enforcement or helpful tips leading to the arrest of criminals whose photos appear in posters under the first category while Tk 50,000 for the arrest of those under the second category.

Posters under the first category include photos and other details of the following eight top criminals:

Kala Jahangir, 26, son of Golam Rahman, of Bangaon village under Bogra Sadar, address 131/1/Adarsha Palli, Ibrahimpur under Kafrul thana;

Prokash Kumar Biswas, son of Bimal Chandra Biswas of 417/3 South Paikpara, Mirpur;

Molla Masud, 30, son of Amjad Hossain of Mohadevpur village under Jhalakathi sadar, address Mirbagh under Ramna thana;

Trimoti Subrata Bain, 35, son of Bipul Bain of Sutrapar, Gournadi thana, Barisal, addresses 1/T/7/ Mirbagh and 186, Nayatola in Ramna;

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## HC rulings put BRTA in double trouble

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The much-publicised campaign to phase out two-stroke autorickshaws from the city to contain air pollution has suffered a big blow as the High Court (HC) ordered the authorities on March 20 to continue issuance of fitness certificates and road permits for these vehicles, according to sources in the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

The HC in another order on March 27 directed the authorities to phase out all two-stroke autorickshaws from the city by December.

On February 20, the BRTA stopped issuing fitness certificates and road permits for all two-stroke autorickshaws following a 'verbal' order from Communications Minister Nazmul Huda. The minister however had assured that an official letter in this regard would be circulated 'soon'. Although the letter was never issued, the BRTA officials acted on the minister's directive and discontinued issuance of the certificates and

permits.

General Secretary of Dhaka Mahanagar Autorickshaw Business Owners Association Moqbul Ahmed Majumdar then moved the High Court and obtained its order on March 20 for continuation of the process.

BRTA officials said yesterday they had just received the HC order. They were now in 'great confusion' whether to resume issuance of the certificates and permits or stick to the March 27 order of the court.

Meanwhile, several hundred owners of autorickshaws are crowding the BRTA offices at Mirpur and elsewhere everyday, demanding road permits and fitness certificates for their vehicles on the basis of the court order.

The government had announced at the beginning of the year that the number of two-stroke vehicles in the city would be reduced to around 10,000 within the

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