

GOVT CONTRACTS WITH GK SHAMIM

# PWD moves to cancel 15 deals

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Public Works Department has served termination notices to GK Shamim's construction firm GKB & Company Pvt Limited in a move to cancel the contracts signed with the company for implementing 15 large government projects.

Construction works of these projects have not seen any progress following the arrest of GK Shamim in September.

Of the 15 projects, 10 were being implemented by GKB & Company individually while the rest under joint ventures with other firms.

Top PWD officials informed this at a meeting with the parliamentary standing committee on housing and public works yesterday.

The PWD high officials also informed the parliamentary watchdog that they have recommended that the government re-activates bank accounts of five partner organisations which, along with GKB and Company, were tasked to implement 37 other development projects.

PWD Chief Engineer Md Shahadat Hossain, who was present at the meeting, told these to The Daily Star.

Rab arrested Shamim, 50, a top government-listed contractor and known to be a Jubo League leader, in connection with extortion and tender manipulation.

Rab during its raid at his home and office seized eight firearms, a huge amount of ammunition, Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) worth Tk 165 crore, around Tk 1.8 crore in cash, a stash of US and Singaporean dollars,

and some foreign liquor, officials said.

We asked GKB & Company why the contracts of 15 construction projects would not be cancelled, said Shahadat, adding that the PWD would decide the next course of action after getting a reply from the firm.

Narayan Chandra Chanda, a ruling AL MP and a member of the House watchdog, said the committee had asked the Ministry of Housing and Public Works to resume works of the projects, which involve GK Shamim's firm, by floating fresh tenders and complete the projects as soon as possible.

"Otherwise, the government may earn a bad name for the delay in completing those development projects," he also said.

Shamim's firm was involved in several government construction projects, including the Rab headquarters, a 20-storey building at Bangladesh Secretariat, Hill Tracts Complex at Baily Road and a couple of government residential quarter buildings in Azimpur, official sources said.

GKB and Company (Pvt) Limited was tasked with implementing 15 large construction projects of the government, involving around Tk 3,000 crore, the company's marketing manager Shafaeth Hossain, said earlier.

The projects include Rab Headquarters in Ashkona, the Revenue Building in Agargaon, the Artha Building and two 25-storey buildings at the Secretariat, the National Institute of Traumatology Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation, the Neuroscience Building, and the NGO Foundation in Agargaon, he added.

## BB revokes rules

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verification the central bank did suggest banks to install artificial intelligence-based software, which none have at present.

But after completion of the transaction the foreign payment option of the card will be deactivated again, meaning a customer who performs multiple online transactions will be caught up in a loop of inputting his/her details on the app for OTAF.

This would have created a difficult situation for banks too as they would need to put a new system in place to verify every OTAF round the clock, said a bank's head of card division requesting not to be named to speak candidly on the matter.

In short, it was a needless step introduced by the central bank to deter a few bad apples but inconveniencing hundreds and thousands of upstanding cardholders.

"No country in the world follows the OTAF process," said the bank official, adding that were the central bank adamant on going down the OTAF route customers would have been affected the most.

In the letter last week, BB also asked banks to be vigilant of online casinos and gambling, foreign exchange trading, and purchase of financial instruments issued in foreign stock markets, cryptocurrency and lottery tickets.

"We have suggested the central bank that OTAF is not the solution to this problem," said Syed Almas Kabir, president of BASIS, the national trade body for the software and IT-enabled service industry.

Rather, banks could use the merchant category code (MCC) to tackle the illegitimate transactions.

"BASIS is highly satisfied with the central bank as it has taken the suggestions positively," he added.

The central bank was prodded to take the drastic step after it received allegations that some people were making illicit transactions by way of their cards, said a BB official.

"We backtracked from that as it has

created a roadblock for customers and banks in settling online transaction abroad," he added.

Industry stakeholders unreservedly welcomed the return to their tried and trusted process for foreign online card transactions, which is streamlined, simpler and effective.

"Both the customers and banks are happy now," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a forum of private banks' chief executive officers.

Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of MasterCard, echoed the same, saying the central bank has taken the move promptly, which has brought relief to banks, customers and payment companies alike.

But, it is not all good news for customers who travel abroad and avail the services of ride-hailing platform Uber -- yet.

The central bank in its notice last week also instructed banks to block payment for purchase of goods and services originated and sold in Bangladesh through international credit cards.

Subsequently, banks have barred their customers from paying for Uber rides with their credit cards as the ride-hailing service debits the fund from the foreign currency quota of the card.

But at present, Bangladeshi cardholders travelling abroad are unable to pay for Uber with their credit cards as local banks have suspended all kinds of payment to the ride-hailing platform because their system is incapable of distinguishing between domestic and foreign rides.

This has put Bangladeshi tourists in an inconvenient position as Uber does not accept cash in many countries.

The BASIS president said the Uber crisis would be solved easily if the San Francisco-based ride-hailing service connects with a local online payment gateway through a Bangladeshi bank.

This will help customers make payments for Uber rides at both home and abroad through their cards, Kabir said.

forward to BTRC to immediately comply with the valid injunction order and not to obstruct Grameenphone from proceeding with its planned network expansion and offer products and services to its customers."

The telecom regulator claims two top mobile carriers owe the state Tk 13,447 crore in revenue share, taxes, and late fees until 2014, but the carriers say the amount was disputed.

Earlier, the telecom regulator separately audited Grameenphone and Robi from their inception until December 2014 and claimed Tk 12,579.95 crore from Grameenphone and Tk 867.24 crore from Robi.

Robi later filed a case on August 25 in a Dhaka court and also sought permanent injunctions on the claim. Robi later moved to the HC to get an injunction as the lower court had denied to issue it.

On September, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal intervened in the matter and took the initiative to settle it out of court. It was proposed that Grameenphone will have to deposit Tk 200 crore and Robi Tk 50 crore to review the audit report.

Later in October, in another initiative by the Prime Minister's ICT affair advisor Sajeeb Wazed Joy asked both parties to settle the matter amicably out of the court.



Newly elected Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, fourth from left, and General Secretary Mainul Hossain Khan Nikhil, third from right, present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with a bouquet at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Long wait for effective steps

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information secretary will work on how awareness can be created about traffic law, the minister said.

The sub-committee of public security division secretary will focus mainly on traffic management while the one under local government division secretary will work on improving local roads, he added.

About the months spent for paperwork, the minister said, "We are yet to start our work because the gazette about the formation of the taskforce was issued on October 16. The taskforce wasted no time."

At least 3,060 people were killed and 3,292 others injured in 3,009 road crashes between January and September this year, according to a police report which has been termed conservative by many.

Police records also mentioned that 2,035 people were killed and 1,920 others injured in 2,609 crashes last year.

The numbers mentioned in the police reports are significantly lower than the ones published in other reports by different road-safety campaigners.

### ACTUAL WORK DELAYED

Amid growing concern over road crashes, the National Road Safety Council (NRSC) on February 19 this year formed a committee led by Shajahan Khan to recommend ways to curb crashes and combat chaotic and indiscipline driving.

The committee drew flak as Shajahan and seven other members of the committee were involved in transport organisations that are often blamed for the very indiscipline that the committee was supposed to put an end to.

The committee submitted its report to the prime minister on April 28 with 111 recommendations.

In its report, the committee specified which authorities would implement which recommendation. It also recommended setting up one or more taskforces to oversee the implementation.

Some of the recommendations include setting limit on the lifespan of all commercial vehicle, creating awareness about traffic rules, taking projects to produce skilled drivers and instructors, establishing driving schools, moving inter-district bus terminals out of the capital, building trauma centres and fire stations at regular intervals on highways, and strengthening the BRTA.

The deadlines for implementing the 111 recommendations were set between this December and 2024.

The taskforce was formed on September 5.

"I am frustrated by the slow pace of the taskforce. I have found that the government doesn't give it much importance. This is painful for me," noted columnist and member of the taskforce Syed Abul Maksud told this newspaper after yesterday's meeting.

Like the taskforce, the sub-committees are mostly formed by ex-officio members, he said, adding that he doubted whether the committees would ever be successful in discharging their duties.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Haque, also a member of the taskforce, said in other countries, the authorities solve transport issues with institutions involved in the sector.

He added that people unrelated to the sector can't be held accountable

and don't have the "ownership". "Other countries strengthen the capacity of institutions concerned to face the problem," he told The Daily Star after the meeting.

"Sustainable development is not possible with hired people," said the former director of Accident Research Institute at Buet.

Prof Shamsul added that different committees formed earlier had made recommendations that were never implemented.

**NINE OF 11 SECRETARIES ABSENT** The home minister and many other participants of the taskforce meeting expressed disappointment that only two of the 11 secretaries, who are members of the taskforce, attended the meeting.

Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary Nazrul Islam and Security Services Division Secretary Md Shahiduzzaman were present at the meeting. But other secretaries sent their representatives.

However, Mostafa Kamal Uddin, senior secretary of Public Security Division, who went to the meeting with the home minister, was included in the taskforce.

Road safety campaigner and member of the taskforce Ilias Kanchan, said, "They should have attended. This [road safety] is an issue of immense public interest."

"I think they did not give due importance to the meeting. It is disappointing for us," he told The Daily Star.

Although five leaders of different transport organisations are members of the taskforce, over 10 transport leaders, including Shajahan Khan, attended the closed-door meeting.

## Beijing to push for early Rohingya repatriation

Says Chinese ambassador in Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka Li Jiming yesterday said China, utilising its traditional friendship with Bangladesh and Myanmar, will do whatever it can to help alleviate the Rohingya crisis and push forward their "early" repatriation.

"The most important [thing is] China acts. China has been keen to conduct various activities to push forward repatriation," he said making it clear that China has no right to "lecture" Myanmar on what to do, except making suggestions and conveying messages.

Terming Myanmar and Bangladesh sovereign countries, the ambassador said all the diplomatic activities of China are done following the principle of equality and mutual respect.

The Chinese ambassador was addressing a seminar titled "Finding way to Peaceful Repatriation of Rohingyas" at the Jatiya Press Club.

The ambassador said due to "unreasonably" high expectations, and "manoeuvres done by players with ulterior motives" China's role has been, to some extent, "exaggerated and misinterpreted".

He said it is a well-accepted idea in many countries that China has a huge influence over Myanmar, and Myanmar will listen whatever they say and do accordingly.

"This idea easily results in the belief that China is always on the side of Myanmar for economic interests and won't really help Bangladesh," said Ambassador Jiming said.

Tripartite Engagement

During the third informal meeting between the three countries in New York this September, Ambassador Jiming said three important decisions were taken on the Rohingya issue.

First, he said, it is the political will and consensus of the three sides that repatriation must be started as early as possible.

Second, the envoy said, a Joint Working Mechanism will be established to delve into the technical issues of repatriation under the political guidance of three Foreign Ministers.

And third, Jiming said, promoting development is a fundamental solution, and border cooperation among China, Bangladesh and Myanmar should be strengthened to create an environment that is conducive to stability and development in the area.

The Ambassador said the State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi also announced that China would deploy a medical team and encourage charity organisations in Cox's Bazar to help the people in need.

The Ambassador said China plays a unique role in finding a sustainable solution to the Rohingya issue. "To put it in one sentence on the Rohingya issue, China concerns, China contributes, and China acts."

The Ambassador said China will not favour one side over the other. "China is trying to persuade Myanmar all the time that the eventual solution to the Rohingya issue will be beneficial to both countries and, I believe, the Rohingya issue will be settled in the end."

## Bolsonaro's son faces probe over 'ghost employees'

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian prosecutors have started a new investigation into the eldest son of President Jair Bolsonaro over suspicion he embezzled public money by hiring "ghost employees," officials said.

The Rio de Janeiro Prosecutors' Office said in a statement Saturday they were investigating Flavio Bolsonaro -- a 38-year-old senator -- in relation to "the employment of ghost employees" from his cabinet.