

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 outstanding 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.

SC asks GP

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order following a petition filed by BTRC seeking a stay on the HC order passed on October 18.

Meanwhile, BTRC's lawyer Barrister Khandakar Reza-E Raquib told journalists that the Tk 2,000 crore was an advance payment.

Sharif Bhuiyan, a lawyer for Grameenphone, however, told The Daily Star, it was an adjustable deposit, adding, "We can confirm what the court actually means [only] after getting the written order."

Raquib, counsellor for the BTRC, said the issue would be settled in the Dhaka court where Grameenphone had filed a petition for the injunction on August 26 after the sum was paid.

After yesterday's order, Grameenphone in a statement said they would wait for the certified copy of the order to finalise the next course of action.

"We reaffirm our commitment to resolve the audit issue by continuing with the jointly committed transparent process towards an amicable resolution with the Prime Minister's ICT advisor and relevant members of the government."

Grameenphone also said, "The existing stay order remains effective and continues to restrain BTRC from taking actions based on the incorrect audit report. Therefore, we look

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 Sajeb 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 Bhavan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Long wait for effective steps

FROM PAGE 1 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.

Termining 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 Councillor 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.

Yet another disastrous

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down the wicket on just the fourth delivery of the day signaled that the Tigers have a long way to go in this format. It possibly also signaled that Mushfiqur had to bat out the session with the tailenders and would not have Riyad for company.

Ebadot Hossain fell with just the 10th delivery of the day, fending a bouncer from Umesh Yadav but only managing to lob it to Virat Kohli at slips. Number 10 batsman Al Amin Hossain survived a few deliveries but the short deliveries that rattled almost all the Bangladesh batsmen -- with two concussion substitutes required for Liton Das and Nayeem Hasan -- perhaps played on the Tigers mind. That brought out an approach from Mushfiqur that did not fit Test cricket.

Having played so well on Day Two, he perished trying to hit Yadav over infield after scoring 74. Yadav produced the slightest edge off Al Amin's bat in his next over to claim his fifth wicket of the match and with Mahmudullah unable to bat, India claimed a record fourth successive innings win, having trounced South Africa twice earlier at home.

The win also handed India their seventh consecutive Test win. On the other hand, the Tigers were left pondering their fifth consecutive Test defeat, with four ending in innings defeats.

Mahmudullah Riyad, Mustafizur Rahman, Al Amin and Test captain Mominul Haque returned to Dhaka yesterday with the rest of the Tigers expected to fly within a day or two.

With the Test series ending 2-0, the Tigers ended their tour of India empty handed. However, their tour had begun on a much more hopeful note. Having battled thick and hazardous smog at New Delhi, the Tigers had begun the T20I series with a bang as Mushfiqur Rahim guided them to victory on the opening T20I.

Led by Mahmudullah Riyad, the team had found some positive energy and the win helped them overcome the turbulence that had overshadowed the country's cricketing focus before the series following the ban handed by the

ICC to ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan.

They were then swept aside by a Rohit Sharma storm at Rajkot in the second T20I and even after an incredible performance from Mohammad Naim in the third T20I, they once again fell away while on the brink of victory.

There was however no time to lick wounds as the team had just three days before the Test series began.

The congested nature of the series meant Bangladesh -- who had eight players coming in to Nagpur to join the other members -- had little time for preparation for the longest and most difficult format.

It showed from the very first day of the first Test at Indore when they were bundled out for 150, their technical flaws exposed, on a seaming track built for magnificent Test cricket.

Abu Jayed showed promise with the ball, picking up four top-order batsmen but India opener Mayank Agarwal made Bangladesh pay with a double hundred after being dropped early in the innings. The rest of the bowlers failed to show up and then India once again ran through the Bangladesh lineup to hand them an innings and 130-run defeat at Indore.

The pink-ball day-night Test at Kolkata had dominated discussion even prior to the first Test and it came to the fore with both teams getting some last-minute preparations done at Indore with the first Test ending inside three days.

A pink festival awaited the Tigers at Kolkata but they could not be party to the celebrations. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had arrived as the chief guest for both India and Bangladesh's first pink-ball match, accepting an invitation from BCCI chief Sourav Ganguly. Everything went according to plan except the Tigers' performance.

Or perhaps not much should have been expected of a team which just could not get into Test gear against a side of India's stature. Having opted to bat, amidst the din of a capacity crowd, Bangladesh were bowled out for 106 runs in the first innings on Day One.

In the end, it concluded on Day

Three, the management of the team shambolic considering their ignorance about getting in a replacement for Mosaddek Hossain, who had returned to the country following the T20I series due to personal reasons.

"Struggle makes people stronger," Test captain Mominul Haque said at a press conference yesterday. "Without being disappointed, you have to find out what you can learn from such struggles. Professional players do that," he reiterated.

Losing both Tests inside three days should bring Bangladesh's focus on Tests under question. There is no place to hide in this format and the defeats further pointed to the gulf in mentality between Bangladesh and the top teams.

"We have many areas to improve upon. If we can improve then we can play better in the upcoming matches," Mominul said after two defeats that once again exposed the team's abilities.

The T20I series result could be forgotten. On the international circuit, Tests are the only basis for earning respect, but Bangladesh's struggles in this format seems to go up a notch with every series.

4 ECs protest

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Mahbub Talukdar, Rafiqul Islam, Kabita Khanam, and Brig Gen (retd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury.

They have requested the chief election commissioner to take effective measures in this regard and inform them.

Responding to a query of a commission member at a meeting on November 14, EC Senior Secretary Md Alamgir said the appointment and financial issues were outside the purview of the commission, and the EC secretariat took steps on the issues upon the chief election commissioner's approval, the letter mentioned.

Only election-related issues need approval of the commission, he added.

This newspaper could not contact Alamgir over phone for his comments.