

The Audacious Conduct of Contractual Secretary Kamruzzaman!

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Special Correspondent : Secretary Kamruzzaman has been acting recklessly ever since his appointment as Health Secretary on a one-year contract. Having gone ‘starved’ of power for 17 years, he is now so ravenous that he pays no heed to either the Minister or the State Minister. The health sector was a notable area of massive corruption under the previous fascist government; specifically, corruption within the sector during the tenures of then-Health Ministers Mohammed Nasim and Dr. Ruhul Haque repeatedly caused embarrassment for the Awami League government. A democratically elected BNP government is currently governing the country. Upon taking the oath of office, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman adopted a zero-tolerance policy against corruption. However, this initiative is being hindered by certain bureaucrats serving on contractual appointments. Instead of declining, the level of corruption has doubled, and certain contractors and business circles—who benefited from the previous fascist government—are taking advantage of this situation. Health Secretary Md. Kamruzzaman has become reckless following his one-year contractual appointment. Allegations of widespread irregularities, corruption, and violations of the ‘Rules of Business’ are circulating against him. The matter has even reached the Prime Minister’s Office. According to allegations, Sujit Debnath, Snehashish, and Khandaker Rabiul Islam—who, as Executive Magistrates at the time, issued orders to open fire during the suppression of the July movement—are currently employed at the Ministry of Health. These three officials, known to be close and trusted aides of the Secretary, have been entrusted with significant responsibilities. During his student days, Deputy Secretary Sujit Debnath was known as a cadre of the Chhatra League. He served as an Executive Magistrate in various areas of Dhaka during the July 2024 movement and issued orders to open fire. He has been appointed as an alternate PS to handle tasks for Administration Branch-1 and the Secretary’s confidential work. Deputy Secretary Snehashish had issued orders to open fire while serving as an Executive Magistrate in various areas of Dhaka; he is currently assigned to Health Branch-4. Senior Assistant Secretary Khandaker Rabiul Islam had also issued orders to open fire to suppress the July movement while serving as an Executive Magistrate in various areas. He has been assigned responsibility for the Administration-2 and Administration-4 branches. The responsibilities held by these three individuals are of critical importance. The Secretary allocated these duties based solely on his own decision; he did so without consulting the Minister, the State Minister, or the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister. Secretary Kamruzzaman identifies himself as pro-BNP, a ‘comrades-in-arms’ of the July uprising, and so forth. Despite the prevailing atmosphere of revolutionary slogans, allegations have surfaced that Secretary Kamruzzaman Chowdhury is retaining corrupt officials and collaborators of the fascist regime in key positions; he is reportedly exploiting their vulnerabilities to siphon off vast sums of money through them. He has kept in important roles officials who served as Deputy Commissioners (DCs) in Bogura, Bagerhat, Cox’s Bazar, and Rangpur, as well as the Private Secretary (PS) to LGRD Minister Tajul Islam during the fascist era—individuals who played pivotal roles in politicizing the administration under the previous Awami League government. He has become a safe haven for officials who were collaborators of the fascist regime.

Although the ‘Delegation of Financial Powers’ mandates that all files regarding procurement or payments under the ministry’s jurisdiction be approved at the ministerial level, the Secretary himself is approving some of them. Moreover, by withholding files, he is engaging in large-scale financial transactions in most instances—ranging from the transfer of doctors to the approval of bills. They are amassing huge sums of money by awarding contracts to individuals who worked with the previous fascist government. Their sole objective is to maximize gains within the span of a one-year contractual appointment. Consequently, the ministry’s transparency, operational efficiency, reform initiatives, and accountability are being jeopardized, while the government’s ability to achieve its targets is being hindered.

Aftab’s Reign Across Successive Governments:

There is an influential company in the health sector named HTMS, owned by Aftab Ahmed, a native of Faridpur. Its Dhaka office is located next to the Abahani Field. Health Secretary Kamruzzaman visits Aftab's office whenever he finds the time; Aftab is one of the Secretary's key sources of income. On the very first day of assuming office, the Secretary received a gift of Euros equivalent to 30 million Taka (3 crore Taka) from Aftab.

1. Rajshahi Medical College University Project, Package-2: Wahid Construction (1st lowest bidder). 2. NDE (Disqualified; failed to extend the bank guarantee). 3. Spectra Engineering Limited (Disqualified due to documentation issues). 4. Majid & Sons (Also problematic; submitted Chinese documents lacked the original owner's signature—the signature was forged). Secretary Kamruzzaman has been withholding the file for four months in an attempt to unethically award the contract to the fourth-ranked bidder, Majid & Sons. During the tenure of the previous government, Aftab Ahmed was a business partner of Sheikh Hasina's son-in-law; they shared a close rapport as they hailed from the same district. Dubai served as their hub for leisure and entertainment, where they frequently hosted events involving various actresses and models from Bangladesh. Early in his career, Aftab Ahmed worked as a Child Welfare Officer. He once traveled to Japan for a seminar but failed to return with the rest of the group; consequently, he was dismissed from his job after a prolonged absence and subsequently ventured into business. Governments change and ministers come and go, yet Aftab remains firmly in place. Ministers such as Ruhul Haque, Nasim, and Dr. Zahid Maleque have, at various times, played the role of his "godfather." It is said that he initiates relationships with attractive female officers joining the Ministry of Health—starting with small gifts and eventually escalating to the provision of houses and cars. Many officers, both male and female, remain under his sway. He maintains regular contact with officials and staff across various ranks within the Ministry, with financial transactions taking place throughout the year, particularly during festivals like Eid and Puja. Aftab Ahmed siphoned off 18 crore taka through Dr. Uttam Barua without performing any actual work at Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital; the licenses involved were subsequently blacklisted after the matter was reported in various daily newspapers. The current Secretary, Md. Kamruzzaman, is firmly under Aftab's sway. Aftab has it all—money, women, and cars—and the Secretary visits Aftab's office whenever he finds the time. Aftab serves as the Secretary's sole source of income; merely skimming a portion of the Health Ministry's vast empire is enough to sustain him.

Rampant Bribery in Physician Transfers and Promotions : Bribes ranging from 5 to 10 lakh Taka are accepted for the transfer and promotion of physicians; in certain instances, the amount reaches 10 to 20 lakh Taka. Files are withheld if terms are not agreed upon. A commission of 2% to 5% is charged for the approval of contractor bills. Duties among officials are assigned and 80–90% of physician transfers are executed through unilateral decisions, without any consultation with the Minister or State Minister or obtaining their approval. It is widely rumored that the Secretary is running the ministry single-handedly. Taking advantage of the situation, officials allied with the Awami fascist regime are siphoning off large sums of money by retaining key positions instead of being removed from the ministry.

Health Secretary Md. Kamruzzaman Chowdhury is acting contrary to the current government's drive for dynamism, transparency, and reform. Delays have plagued the processing of files in his department; in some instances, files remain pending his signature for 10 to 30 days, or await discussion with the Minister or State Minister. He accepts bribes ranging from 5 to 10 lakh Taka for the transfer and promotion of doctors; in certain instances, the amount reaches 10 to 20 lakh Taka. Files are withheld if terms are not agreed upon. It is widely rumored that he collects a commission of 2% to 5% on the approval of contractor bills for the CMSD and other institutions. The Secretary's commission-based dealings have now become an open secret. His PS, Nazmus Sakib, is his primary accomplice. During the previous regime, Sakib served as the First Secretary at the embassy in London—a position he held as a beneficiary of the fascist government. Files from his office... There have been undue delays in decision-making. In some instances, files remain pending for his signature for periods ranging from 10 to 30 days or even several months. Even when the Minister or State Minister writes to the Secretary requesting a discussion regarding a file, he disregards the matter and leaves the file unattended in a dismissive manner. Kamruzzaman alone is enough to turn the Ministry of Health into a hotbed of corruption and cause it to lag behind in every respect.

Despite multiple attempts to contact the Health Secretary on his mobile phone regarding these issues, he did not answer the calls.