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Appointment of Bangladesh envoy to US cancelled

UNB, Dhaka

The government has cancelled the contractual appointment of Md Shahidul Islam as Bangladesh's Ambassador to the United States.

The order came into effect on September 1 this year, said the public administration ministry yesterday in a gazette notification.

The decision was taken considering the application submitted by Shahidul Islam, the notification added.

Shahidul, a retired officer of the BCS (foreign cadre), will be replaced by Mohammad Imran, who is now serving as Bangladesh's high commissioner to India.

The foreign ministry announced the appointment of Mohammad Imran as next Bangladesh's ambassador to the US in July.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Imran will be replaced in New Delhi by Mostafizur Rahman, the permanent representative of Bangladesh in Geneva.

NSU LAND PROCUREMENT
Former trustees intentionally paid Tk 304cr extra
Finds ACC probe; they also got kickbacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The members of a former board of trustees of North South University and a real estate company showed an inflated price of land on records and misappropriated about Tk 304 crore when it was purchased by the university, according to an investigation.

The then board members showed on records that they had paid about Tk 535.19 crore to Ashaloy Housing and Developers for the land between 2016 and 2021, according to a probe report of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

The actual price of the land was about Tk 231 crore.

The real estate company deposited about Tk 91.5 crore to the trustees' personal bank accounts in bribe, reads the report written by ACC Director Farid Ahmed Patwary.

ACC Secretary Mahbub Hossain yesterday said charges were pressed against the suspects.

On May 5, the ACC sued former trustee board chairman Azim Uddin Ahmed and members MA Kashem, Benajir Ahmed, Rehana Rahman and Mohammed Shahjahan, and Ashaloy Housing and Developers Managing Director Amin Md Hilaly.

The real estate company's Chairperson Omar Faruk, and directors Anwara Begum and Syed AK Anwaruzzaman were added in the list of accused during the investigation.

According to the charges pressed, the NSU made an agreement with the company for buying land in Jangir, Gutia and Pitolganj mouza of Narayanganj's Rupganj.

The university paid the company Tk 500 crore for 8,250 decimals of land in 2016. The university paid Tk 35.19 crore for another 846.88 decimals of land in the same mouzas between 2019 and 2021.

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Bridge over Lohalia river not finished in 10 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Construction of the bridge over the Lohalia river on the Patuakhali-Dashmina road has not been completed even after 10 years.

The structural work of the 576-metre bridge, near Patuakhali town, started in 2012.

But since then, the delay increased public suffering as well as significantly escalated the cost of construction.

In 2012, Patuakhali Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) took the initiative to construct a 107-metre steel bridge over the Lohalia, flanked by concrete structures at both ends.

In the initial stages, the height of the bridge was to be 7.3 metres, while the construction cost was estimated at Tk 46.45 crore.

In 2014, with almost 54 percent of the construction work already done, Payra seaport authorities raised objections about the height of the bridge, and the work remained suspended for years.

In 2019, LGED took up the unfinished work under a new project, by increasing the height of the bridge to 13.5 metre, and it was scheduled to be completed in December 2020.

But due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a few other reasons, the construction cost of the bridge has been increased by up to Tk 7.09 crore, while the deadline for completion of the construction work was rescheduled for June this year.

Meanwhile, construction work of other parts of the

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The recent decision to build "luxurious residences" at the cost of Tk 42.85 crore for the cabinet and principal secretaries by the housing and public works ministry has drawn flak from different quarters.

The widespread criticism comes at a time when people are repeatedly being advised to practise austerity to overcome the current economic crises.

Experts say when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself has been repeatedly calling for cost cutting and restraint in public expenditure, such an atrociously expensive project funded by taxpayers' money is highly questionable.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said, "I worked as [both] cabinet and principal secretaries, but I never felt the need for swimming pools or these many televisions [which are in the project proposal]. I never felt like I was in a sorry state without these."

In the Development Project Proposal (DPP), the Public Works Department, which is the implementing agency, claimed the project will create "temporary employment opportunities" during the implementation phase, which

will "help eradicate poverty to some extent".

Meanwhile, people from different quarters took to social media over the last couple of days to blast the initiative.

Project documents indicate the estimated cost of the two three-storey buildings is Tk 18.88 crore. Another Tk 22.5 crore will be spent

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on the interior and exterior designs and a service building.

The Planning Commission, meanwhile, has decided to send the project proposal back to the housing and public works ministry, as it did not follow proper procedure, officials said.

The ministry had directly sent the DPP to the physical planning,

water supply and housing wing of the commission for approval, whereas it was supposed to be sent to the programming division, said an official, preferring anonymity.

"It [the DPP] will now be sent back to the ministry."

According to the proper procedure, the proposal is first supposed to be sent to the programming division, which will then list it as an "unapproved project".

It will then be sent to physical planning, water supply and housing wing, who will present it before the Project Evaluation Committee.

"If the project then gets a nod and the cost is shown to be below Tk 50 crore, it is then presented to the planning minister for approval," the official said.

Ali Imam Majumder suggested renovating existing residences and earmarking those as the homes of the cabinet and principal secretaries.

"In terms of improvement, the sky is the limit. But this is not the right time. If their existing residences do not have enough facilities, these can be renovated at a reasonable cost," he said, adding that the project should be halted right away.

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Construction work of a bridge over the Lohalia river on Patuakhali-Dashmina road remains suspended for years due to various reasons, causing hardships for locals. The work, which began around 10 years ago, is expected to start again next month. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

GAIBANDHA-5 BY-POLLS Cops, admin saw nothing wrong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

The local administration and law enforcers said they did not see any irregularities during the suspended Gaibandha-5 by-polls.

The Election Commission stopped the October 12 by-election, saying the situation "went out of control" due to widespread electoral irregularities.

The deputy commissioner of Gaibandha, 17 executive magistrates, two commanding officers of BGB and Rab, returning officer of the by-polls, and the superintendent of Gaibandha police yesterday told the probe committee formed by the EC.

The body, formed to unearth the irregularities and find those involved, recorded statements of 27 people, including the five candidates of the by-polls, at the Gaibandha Circuit House from 10:00am to 2:30pm.

Talking to reporters after giving statements, Waliur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Gaibandha, said, "The probe body asked about the law and order on the election day. They wanted to know many things. We answered the queries verbally and in writing. We only said the election was free, fair and peaceful in most of the polling stations."

In reply to a question whether they took immediate action when the EC asked after seeing irregularities on CCTV at various centres, the DC

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Thief calls 999 for help in getting out of shop he was burgling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A professional thief dialed national helpline 999 and sought help from the police to avoid a possible mob beating in Barishal city after he was unable to get out of a shop he was burgling.

"This is for the first time in my decade-long career that I have seen a thief call police while committing the crime," said Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

Yasin Khan, 40, broke into a grocery store at AR Khan Bazaar in the city early Wednesday. By the time he was finished stealing, it was too late for his safe escape, said the OC.

He then called 999 and sought help saying he was in "great danger" and the law enforcers must "rescue" him, the OC said, adding that Yasin did it fearing a possible mob beating.

Jhantu Mia, owner of the grocery store, said he went to his shop but found police searching his store and barring him from getting in.

"Later, as the policemen took someone out of the store, I realised that they caught a thief," he said.

Police arrested Yasin on the spot. He was sent to jail via a Barishal court yesterday.

RU student's death was an accident

Say police; RMCH files complaint against RU students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi University student MGM Shahriar died as he accidentally slipped and fell from the third floor of his three-storey dormitory, said police yesterday.

"He accidentally slipped and fell on a concrete gutter as he was talking over the mobile phone," said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Abu Kalam Siddique.

Police found the details during their primary investigation on Wednesday, he added.

Meanwhile, the authorities of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital said the on-duty doctor could not detect any pulse immediately after he was taken to the hospital. Later, he confirmed Shahriar's death after conducting an ECG test on him.

"The on-duty doctor hesitated to declare Shahriar dead immediately,"

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