

Aminul Islam made Dhaka Wasa MD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed former secretary Aminul Islam as the managing director (MD) of Dhaka Wasa.

In a gazette notification issued yesterday, the Ministry of Public Administration said Aminul Islam will serve as the MD of Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) for one year on a contractual basis.

The previous managing director, Abdus Salam Bepari, resigned on Sunday after allegations of money laundering and purchasing assets abroad surfaced against him.

Following his resignation, Md Moniruzzaman, additional secretary to the Local Government Division of the LGRD ministry, was given the additional charge of Dhaka Wasa's MD on Monday. Aminul was officially appointed to the post yesterday.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman presents a symbolic Family Card to a beneficiary at the launch of the government's Family Card programme at the T&T Ground near Korail slum in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Bhutan seeks FTA with Bangladesh

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh has asked Bhutan to submit a proposal for a possible free trade agreement (FTA) after the Himalayan kingdom expressed interest in upgrading existing bilateral trade ties from the current preferential trade agreement (PTA).

Once the proposal arrives, it will be sent to the technical committee on trade for scrutiny before a final decision is taken, Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

The development came on the final day of a two-day visit to Dhaka by a commerce secretary-level delegation from Bhutan.

Tashi Wangmo, secretary of Bhutan's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, raised the proposal for an FTA during a meeting between the two sides at a hotel in Dhaka.

In December 2020, Bangladesh and Bhutan signed a PTA. Under the agreement, Bangladesh grants duty-free access to 34 Bhutanese products, while Bhutan allows duty-free entry for 100 Bangladeshi goods.

The deal marked Bangladesh's first bilateral trade agreement. During yesterday's meeting, Bhutan also asked Bangladesh to expand the list of products eligible for duty-free access under the PTA from the current 34 items.

Moreover, the Bhutanese side proposed using Chattogram port for imports and exports, citing the country's landlocked geography, Rahman said.

He added that Bangladesh would allow Bhutan to use Pangaon port in Keraniganj and Khanpur river port in Narayanganj to transport goods. Dhaka will review Thimphu's request to use Chattogram port.

Recently, a shipment imported from Thailand by Bhutanese importers passed through Chattogram port as a trial run, Rahman said.

If the arrangement is approved, the ministries of road transport and highways and shipping, along with other relevant agencies, will determine the fee structure for Bhutan's use of Chattogram port, he added.

'No oil thru' Hormuz if attacks continue'

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of peace and prosperity for all or will be a strait of defeat and suffering for warmongers," Iran's security chief Ali Larijani declared.

The price increase also followed strikes on oil depots in Iran and attacks on oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and around the Gulf, which continued yesterday, with explosions heard in Doha.

Qatar, where a suspension of LNG exports has sent European energy prices sky-high, said Iranian attacks on its civilian infrastructure were continuing.

The Israeli military announced, meanwhile, a new wave of attacks on Tehran, while the US also stepped up its air and missile assault.

"Today will be yet again our most intense day of strikes inside Iran," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told a news conference at the Pentagon.

'CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES'
The exchanges of fire will increase fears of economic instability, with traders and energy policy makers nervously following events in the Gulf, the source of around a fifth of world oil and gas supplies.

"There would be catastrophic consequences for the world's oil markets the longer the disruption goes on and the more drastic the consequences for the global economy," Saudi oil giant Aramco's president and CEO Amin H Nasser told journalists.

"It's absolutely critical that shipping resumes in the Strait of Hormuz."

Egypt increased the cost of fuels by up to 30 percent and Pakistan said it would provide naval escorts to commercial shipping. France has dispatched warships to the region.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) mocked Trump's bid to lessen the economic impact of the war, warning, "The Iranian armed forces... will not allow the export of a single litre of oil from the region to the hostile side and its partners until

further notice."

"It is we who will determine the end of the war," the IRGC, seen as close to Iran's new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, said in a statement carried by Iranian media.

Larijani issued a thinly veiled threat to Trump himself, warning him to be careful "not to be eliminated".

"Iran is not afraid of your empty threats. Even those greater than you could not eliminate the Iranian nation," Larijani wrote in a social media post.

'DEATH, FIRE AND FURY'
Iran's warnings came as a response to Trump, who gave a news conference in a Florida ballroom to declare of the war. "It's going to be ended soon, and if it starts up again, they'll be hit even harder."

"We've already won in many ways, but we haven't won enough," Trump said Monday.

But, in a later post on his social media platform, Trump warned that if Tehran interferes with oil exports, the US military will bomb the country in such a way to "make it virtually impossible for Iran to ever be built back, as a nation, again."

"Death, fire, and fury will reign upon them — But I hope, and pray, that it does not happen!" he wrote.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also predicted that the conflict would continue, expressing hope that the Iranian people would seize the opportunity to "cast off the yoke of tyranny".

"Ultimately, it depends on them. But there is no doubt that, with the actions taken so far, we are breaking their bones, and we are not done yet," he said.

TRUMP, PUTIN TALK
US President Donald Trump and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin spoke Monday about the war in Iran and prospects for peace in Ukraine, hours after Putin warned of a global energy crisis.

The Kremlin said Trump called Putin, in the leaders' first telephone call this year, and they discussed Russian ideas for a speedy end to the conflict in Iran, the military situation in Ukraine and the impact of Venezuela on the global oil market.

Trump later told reporters he pressed Putin to resolve the Ukraine war.

Putin cautioned that US-Israeli strikes on Iran had triggered turmoil in energy markets, threatening oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz. He said Russia was ready to resume long-term cooperation with Europe.

Washington is weighing easing oil sanctions on Russia to boost global supply. Officials said options include targeted relief for countries such as India.

The Kremlin described the call as "substantial," noting Trump's interest in a rapid ceasefire and settlement in Ukraine.

RARE VOLATILITY
On Monday, world oil prices swept past the symbolic level of \$100 a barrel and were briefly up 30 percent on the day before falling back after Trump's intervention. But they rose again more slowly yesterday, and experts warned that the economic outlook remains extremely volatile.

"Rare are days in the markets when you get this much volatility," said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, an analyst for Swissquote Bank, warning that investors are overreacting to every bit of news even when officials' statements contradict each other.

"Part of yesterday's optimism came after Trump said the war would end 'soon' and that the US was ahead of schedule," she said.

"Concretely, however, the conflict in the Middle East continues at full speed, political developments are not pointing to a near-term resolution, and there is little clarity about the US plans."

Tarique urges calm amid Mideast storm

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16 other women also received their cards from him.

Empowering women is crucial as it is quite impossible to advance the country leaving half of the population behind, Tarique said.

"Half of the population of Bangladesh is women. We firmly believe that if we leave this half of the population behind, if we do not empower this half of the population, if we do not empower them, if we cannot empower them educationally and economically, then it is certainly not possible to move the country forward in any way."

The government has to follow rules and regulations when taking on any initiative; as such, it has to take pilot projects first.

The Family Card programme is being piloted at 14 places or 14 upazilas across Bangladesh involving about 37,000 women, he said.

Some 15 wards across 13 city corporations and unions spanning 13 districts across the country have been chosen for the pilot, according to the social welfare ministry.

The selected households will receive Tk 2,500 through the government-to-person digital payment system directly to the women's MFS or bank accounts.

The government has also started the work on the Farmers' Card, the BNP's another landmark election pledge, Tarique said.

Within the next month, the card will be handed over to farmers, he said, adding that the government last week waived off agricultural loans up to Tk 10,000, including interest.

"This government has been elected by the people of this country. Naturally, it is bound to remain accountable to them," he added.

Yesterday, the Family Card inauguration programme was held in 14 areas across Chattogram, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Khulna, Barishal, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions.

Govt looking at fuel source options

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About a fifth of the world's crude oil usually passes through the narrow waterway, mostly to the Asian markets, so the situation would become critical if the other countries' refineries fail to secure crude to refine, said officials of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) involved with the proceedings.

As part of the contingency planning, the government is exploring potential imports from countries including the US, China, and several African nations, while also considering increasing the volumes from existing suppliers like Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and India.

Bangladesh imports fuel oil from a range of countries, including Iran, the UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Qatar in the Middle East, as well as Singapore, Malaysia, and India, according to official data.

Between January 2025 and March 8 this year, Bangladesh imported about 20.69 lakh tonnes of crude oil, 77 percent of which came from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Malaysia and the UAE, according to data from the National Board of Revenue.

Saudi Arabia was the largest supplier, accounting for roughly 35 percent of the total crude oil imports, followed by the UAE (about 30 percent).

Crude oil imported by Bangladesh is refined at Eastern Refinery, where it is processed into around 13 petroleum products, including diesel, petrol, octane and jet fuel.

Between January last year and March

Bangladesh may lose

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"Bangladesh needs to thoroughly assess the implications of the ART with a fiscal-budgetary lens and open discussions with the US Trade Representative to review the agreement," the CPD said.

The briefing was organised to recommend measures for the upcoming national budget for fiscal year 2026-27, which begins in July.

CPD warned that the agreement could have significant implications for Bangladesh's fiscal and budgetary framework and may also raise questions about the country's economic sovereignty.

According to the think tank, the deal includes provisions touching on trade relations with third countries and attempts to limit where goods can or cannot be sourced from.

Speaking at the event, CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman said the US Supreme Court's decision to strike down President Donald Trump's global tariffs has opened a fresh window for discussion.

"If Bangladesh wishes, it can reassess the agreement," he said in response to a question.

Bangladesh initially faced a proposed 37 percent tariff after Trump announced reciprocal tariffs under a national emergency law on April 2 last year. The rate was later reduced to 35 percent, then to 20 percent during negotiations, and finally to 19 percent under the deal signed by the interim government three days before the February 12 general election.

The agreement drew criticism from several economists and analysts, who argued that many of its provisions favour US interests and could have long-term implications for Bangladesh.

Later, the US Supreme Court declared Trump's global tariffs illegal. Trump subsequently introduced a 15 percent universal tariff.

As a result, Bangladesh now faces an effective reciprocal tariff of 15 percent. Combined with the country's existing average tariff of 16.5 percent, the total effective tariff burden on Bangladeshi exports stands at about 31.5 percent.

According to a paper presented by CPD at the event, Bangladesh will have to grant duty-free access to around

4,500 US products immediately under the agreement, while another 2,210 product categories are expected to receive duty-free treatment over the next five to 10 years.

Using government data, the CPD said import duties on US goods generated about \$108.3 million, or roughly Tk 1,327 crore, in fiscal year 2024-25.

"If the structure of imports from the United States remains unchanged, at least this amount could be lost annually once the agreement is fully implemented," said CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun.

Beyond the direct revenue loss, she cautioned that the arrangement could also create complications under World Trade Organization rules.

Bangladesh's unilateral decision to grant duty-free access to US goods does not constitute a formal free trade agreement, which normally allows exceptions to the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle.

As a result, the move could be viewed as inconsistent with Bangladesh's MFN obligations at the WTO, potentially allowing other member states to challenge it before the organisation's Dispute Settlement Body, according to CPD.

The agreement may also carry broader fiscal implications linked to procurement commitments.

"If Bangladesh is required to purchase certain goods from the United States under the deal, the government may need to adjust its public procurement policies," Fahmida said.

Such commitments could increase public spending, particularly if US imports prove more expensive than alternative sources.

Mustafizur added that the growing tendency to use trade as a geopolitical tool is weakening the WTO system.

He noted that several provisions in the agreement carry financial risks and that much of its implementation would depend on the private sector.

However, he said, if the government wants to encourage private companies to import from the United States, it may have to offer subsidies.

"Otherwise, the question arises as to why they [private sector] would choose to import specifically from the United States," he said.

Chief prosecutor launches probe

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Amin, and a senior law research officer at the tribunal.

At the meeting, Aminul asked for and reviewed all documents related to the case in question.

The controversy emerged after media reports cited multiple audio recordings of WhatsApp conversations purportedly involving former ICT prosecutor Saimum Reza Talukdar.

According to the reports, he sought Tk 1 crore from the family of ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury, a former Awami League MP, to arrange bail in a crimes against humanity case linked to the July uprising.

Saimum had been appointed as a prosecutor on October 7, 2024. The law ministry accepted his resignation on Monday.

Contacted yesterday, Saimum denied the allegations. "I would address the matter through the legal process," he said.

Aminul said the prosecution would conduct a forensic examination of the audio recordings to determine their authenticity. He also said both past and present allegations against prosecutors would be reviewed.

"I will form an internal committee and review all matters since the tribunal was restructured. If any irregularities are found, I will report them to the appropriate authorities," he said.

"If any truth is found, I will take action within the limits of the law or make the necessary recommendations," he added,

noting that explanations would be sought from all relevant individuals, including former officials if necessary.

The chief prosecutor said he first learned of the allegation through news reports yesterday morning and immediately called an emergency meeting of prosecutors at 9:00am.

"This news has deeply saddened me. If any prosecutor is found involved in corruption, even to the slightest degree, I will not spare them," he said, acknowledging that such allegations could create an image crisis for the tribunal.

He also noted that although media reports and audio recordings had surfaced, the prosecution had not yet received a formal complaint regarding the alleged bribery attempt.

Aminul said Saimum had submitted his resignation letter two to three days ago, stating that he wished to return to his previous profession as a teacher.

"Once someone resigns, there is little scope for me to retain them. I accepted the resignation and forwarded it to the law ministry through due procedure," he said.

According to media reports, former chief prosecutor Tajul Islam removed Saimum from the case after learning of the allegations but did not take further action, and Saimum continued performing other duties at the tribunal.

The reports said members of Fazle Karim's family met Tajul on December 18 last year and informed him that money had been demanded. They played a recording of a

December 10 conversation but did not provide a copy.

Tajul told The Daily Star that no formal or informal complaint had been made during his tenure. He said he became suspicious when Saimum claimed that police were not implicated in the investigation, although police carried out atrocities across the country during the uprising. As a result, he withdrew Saimum from the case.

Incumbent Chief Prosecutor Aminul described the allegation as serious and said action should have been taken earlier.

The issue has also caused unease within the prosecution team. Several prosecutors expressed concern that the succession of allegations was affecting their ability to focus on tribunal proceedings.

Speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, a prosecutor said the developments had unsettled many colleagues.

"These incidents are making us extremely worried one after another. We are finding it difficult to concentrate properly on trial work. At the moment, our focus has largely shifted away from the cases," the prosecutor said.

Aminul warned that any future misconduct within the prosecution team would be dealt with strictly.

"If even the slightest credible allegation of corruption arises against any prosecutor during my tenure, they will not remain here the next day," he said.