

EVALUATING KU INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT Ministry starts probing 'graft' by own officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The education ministry has opened an investigation into an allegation of demanding a "remuneration of Tk 10 lakh" by its officials from the Khulna University (KU) authorities for evaluating the university's infrastructure project.

The committee headed by Ashoke Kumar Biswas, additional secretary of technical wing of the ministry, was asked to submit a report in the shortest possible time, the ministry sources said. He already left for KU yesterday.

The ministry formed the committee on Monday after the KU vice chancellor lodged a written complaint with it about the remuneration for a mid-term evaluation of the project whose term will end on June 30.

Two officials of the ministry's planning wing and an official of University Grants Commission (UGC) made the demand during an inspection at the university on Friday, alleged KU officials. They were the members of a 10-member mid-term evaluation committee of the ministry.

The ministry has already asked the officials -- Swapn Kumar Gosh, joint chief of planning wing, and Imrul Mohsin, deputy chief of the wing -- not to join office until further notice. Swapn is the chief of the evaluation committee.

The UGC, on the other hand, sent its two officials -- Nasima Rahman, acting director of planning and development division, and Atower Rahman, its senior assistant director -- into forced leave on the basis of the complaint by the KU VC about "demanding bribe of Tk 10 lakh", said an UGC press release.

It also formed another three-member probe committee with its member Prof Md Akhtar Hossain as its convener to look into the matter, the release said. It has been asked to submit its report within two weeks.

The four-year project was launched in 2010 at a cost of Tk 80 crore, but its term was extended twice as the fund was not released

on time. The project cost stands at around Tk 86 crore, said KU officials.

The ministry and KU sources said these two ministry officials incorporated the component of a remuneration of Tk 10 lakh in the Revised Development Project Proforma (RDPP) as mid-term evaluation without informing the education secretary.

Talking to reporters at the ministry yesterday, Swapn said it was not illegal as there was a provision of remuneration in the RDPP.

Imrul could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

KU VC Prof Mohammad Fayek Uzzaman told The Daily Star that the evaluation committee visited the university on April 29. During a meeting, he asked the team about the mid-term evaluation at this stage when the project was about to end in two months.

Swapn and Imrul replied that they could do it anytime, he added.

About remuneration, they told him that this issue was incorporated in the RDPP and was approved by the secretary and UGC chairman, he said.

Seeking anonymity, a ministry official said although the RDPP was approved by the secretary and UGC chair, it was not possible for them to read all of its papers.

"During the meeting with the vice chancellor one of the members of the team said he was not aware of any remuneration," he said.

Before leaving the campus, Swapn asked the director of planning and development wing of the university to send the money to them by Monday.

"They threatened not to release the last instalment of the fund if the money is not sent by the stipulated time. They even said they would create problem for the upcoming projects," said a KU official.

During a coordination meeting on Monday, the education secretary uttered a note of caution for the officials, saying actions would be taken if any of them was found involved in corruption.