

HC summons

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non-banking financial institution, of the loan defaulters.

Speaking to The Daily Star, PLFS's lawyer Mejbahur Rahman said the process of liquidation of the company was underway.

In this situation, the HC's company bench had sought the list of the loan defaulters and accordingly, the list was submitted to the bench.

The 280 individuals took loans amounting Tk 1,655 crore. The loan amounts ranged from Tk 5 lakh to over Tk 200 crore, said Mejbahur.

After examining the list, the HC bench yesterday issued show cause notices on the 280 loan defaulters and summoned them to appear before it on February 23, he added.

Meanwhile, another HC bench yesterday sought details, including names, addresses and status of the Bangladesh Bank officials who were in charge of overseeing financial institutions and money laundering issues from 2008 to 2020.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim passed the order after holding hearing on a suo moto (voluntary) rule issued in this regard.

The court also asked the central bank governor and other officials concerned to inquire if the then officials were responsible for the bankruptcy of the country's certain financial institutions and to submit reports to it on February 15.

The bench rejected a petition, filed by Md Asaduzzaman Khan, provisional liquidator of the PLFS and also the deputy general manager of the central bank, to become a party in the case.

Lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the Anti-Corruption Commission, while Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state and lawyer Khan Mohammad Shameem Aziz appeared for the central bank.

Issuing the suo moto rule, the HC bench on November 19 last year wanted to know from the respondents what steps were taken to bring home Proshanta Kumar Halder, known as PK Halder, from abroad in connection with a money laundering case.

LAWYER, DAUGHTER PLACED ON REMAND

In another development, the Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka yesterday placed a lawyer and his daughter on three-day remand each in a graft case filed against PK Halder, also former NRB Global Bank managing director.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh placed Sukumar Mridha and his daughter Anindita Mridha on remand a few hours after they were arrested.

ACC Deputy Director Salah Uddin, also the investigation officer of the case, quizzed the duo for about three hours.

According to ACC sources, the two helped Halder amass illegal wealth.

On January 8 last year, the graft watchdog had filed the case against Halder over possessing about Tk 275 crore beyond his known sources of income.

Talking to journalists yesterday, Sukumar claimed that he was not involved in any misappropriation. "He [PK Halder] is only my client," he said.

UGC

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UGC Acting Secretary Ferdous Zaman sent the letter to the PSC today, said press release of the grants commission.

In the letter, the UGC said that all education institutions have been closed since March 18, 2020, following a government announcement of nationwide closure due to Covid-19. As such, Honour's and Master's degrees exams were not conducted as per schedule.

On December 13 last year, a meeting was held between the UGC chairman and vice chancellors of public universities and a decision was taken to hold all exams of Honour's and Master's degrees.

In that meeting, the university VCs urged the UGC to take steps for extending the deadline of the 43rd BCS applications, the press release said.

Through the general 43rd BCS, 1,814 officials will be recruited, including 300 in public administration, 100 in police, 25 in foreign services, and 843 teachers.

Currently, the application process for the 43rd BCS, which began from 10:00am on December 31, is scheduled to go on till 6:00am on January 30.

100pc ballots

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An official, requesting anonymity, said an old voters' list might have been used at the centre, creating the opportunity for fraudulence.

The district administration and election officials said they were investigating the allegations.

AL nominee Enamul Haque said these were isolated cases, and those making the allegations had bad intentions.



Smoke rises from fire at Serum Institute of India in Pune, India yesterday. At least five people were killed in the fire, said Pune district collector Rajesh Deshmukh. The company insisted that the production of vaccines to counter the coronavirus pandemic was not affected.

PHOTO: REUTERS

5 killed in fire at India's Serum

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emerged in China in late 2019, according to a tally compiled by AFP yesterday based on official figures. The US has suffered the highest death toll with 406,162 fatalities, followed by Brazil with 212,831 and India 152,869.

Serum Institute -- founded in 1966 -- is the world's largest vaccine manufacturer by volume, producing 1.5 billion doses a year even before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

It makes vaccines against polio, diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis B, measles, mumps and rubella, which are exported to more than 170 countries.

The company has spent nearly a billion dollars in recent years enlarging and improving the giant Pune campus.

In January, Indian regulators approved two vaccines -- Covishield, produced by the Serum Institute, and Covaxin, made by Indian firm Bharat Biotech.

India began one of the world's biggest vaccine rollouts on Saturday, aiming to vaccinate 300 million people by July with both Covishield and Covaxin.

Many other countries are also

relying on the Serum Institute to supply them with the vaccine. The country plans to offer 20 million doses to its South Asian neighbours, with Latin America, Africa and Central Asia next in line.

Serum Institute also plans to supply 200 million doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries.

In Europe, leaders, facing threats of new coronavirus variants, were mulling for imposing travel restrictions on internal borders to stop the spread.

The chiefs will hold a summit -- by videolink to protect themselves from infection -- to address "the seriousness of the situation with the new variants," an EU official said.

Virus mutations spreading from Britain, South Africa and Brazil have alarmed EU authorities because of their increased infectivity, prompting bans or restrictions on travellers from those countries.

Now calls are increasing to shut the intra-EU borders to slow their spread, but German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday said that such a step would be "the last resort".

Biden reverses Trump policies on first day

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memorandums and directives.

"Some of the executive actions I'm going to be signing today are going to help change the course of the Covid crisis, we're going to combat climate change in a way that we haven't done so far and advance racial equity and support other underserved communities" said Biden. "These are just all starting points"

Aides said the actions the Democratic president signed included a mask mandate on federal property and for federal employees, an order to establish a new White House office coordinating the response to the coronavirus, and halting the process of withdrawing from the World Health Organization.

Biden signed a document to begin the process of re-entering the Paris climate accord and issued a sweeping order tackling climate change, including revoking the presidential permit granted to the contentious Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Among a raft of orders addressing immigration, Biden revoked Trump's emergency declaration that helped fund the construction of a border wall and ended a travel ban on some majority-Muslim countries.

The Day One plans were just the start of a flurry of executive actions Biden would take soon after entering office, said his press secretary, Jen Psaki.

"In the coming days and weeks, we will be announcing additional executive actions that confront these challenges and deliver on the president-elect's promises to the American people," Psaki said.

Further actions would include revoking the ban on military service by transgender Americans, and reversing

a policy that blocks US funding for programs overseas linked to abortion, reports Reuters.

On the economic front, Biden asked the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to extend a moratorium on evictions until the end of March, and the Department of Education to suspend student loan payments until the end of September.

\$1.9 TRILLION VIRUS PLAN
Biden launched a \$1.9 trillion plan to tackle the pandemic at home and despatched his top expert Anthony Fauci to Switzerland.

"Under trying circumstances, this organisation has rallied the scientific and research and development community to accelerate vaccines, therapies and diagnostics," Fauci told a WHO meeting in Geneva, confirming that the US would continue to pay its dues to the organisation.

Biden was a fierce critic of Trump's approach to tackling the virus in the US, which with more than 400,000 dead is the world's worst-hit nation.

The new president is seeking to vaccinate 100 million people in the next 100 days, increase the use of masks and testing, expand the public health workforce and offer more emergency relief to those struggling with the restrictions.

"For almost a year now, Americans could not look to the federal government for any strategy," said Jeff Zients, coordinator of the new Covid-19 task force. "As president Biden steps into office today, that all changes."

New White House vaccines coordinator Bechara Choucair restated the administration's intention to bring online thousands of federal vaccination centers as well as the mobilization of thousands more

workers to help.

'MUSLIM BAN'
Biden rescinded the so-called "Muslim ban", an executive order Trump signed in 2017 that banned travellers from seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the US.

The ban was changed several times amid legal challenges and ultimately upheld by the US Supreme Court in 2018, reports Al Jazeera Online.

"The president put an end to the Muslim ban -- a policy rooted in religious animus and xenophobia," Biden's White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a Wednesday evening briefing.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations welcomed the decision as "an important first step toward undoing the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant policies of the previous administration".

"It is an important fulfilment of a campaign pledge to the Muslim community and its allies," the group's executive director, Nihad Awad, said in a statement.

PARIS AGREEMENT
Biden also signed an executive order to join the Paris Agreement. The move to rejoin the international treaty on climate change is expected to take effect 30 days after it is deposited with the UN, Biden's team said on Wednesday.

In November, the US became the first country in the world to withdraw from the treaty -- a move that fuelled tensions between Washington and its allies in Europe and drew a widespread rebuke from environmental and human rights groups.

Climate-change leaders and campaigners worldwide welcomed Biden's move to rejoin the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Put more emphasis on research

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The university has always played key roles in establishing democracy in the country, she said.

Expressing her hope that the country will overcome the pandemic, she thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving 20 lakh vaccine doses as a gift to Bangladesh.

The PM hoped that shipment of the vaccine that Bangladesh had procured would arrive by January 25-26.

Education Minister Dipu Moni addressed the opening ceremony as a special guest and economist Rehman Sobhan presented the keynote speech.

Prof Rehman Sobhan said Dhaka

University acted like an incubator for generations of political leaders before and after 1947.

It was expected that in an independent Bangladesh, the university would be a centre for learning and give birth to a new generation of leaders and scholars, he said.

"These expectations remain in some distance," he added.

In a recent global ranking of universities, Dhaka University was not among the top 1,000, he said, adding that among the universities in Asia, Dhaka University ranked the 134th.

But 10 universities in China were

named among the top 100 of the world, he said.

Dipu Moni urged the university authorities to improve its standard of education following the international trends.

"We have yet to reach the international level in education and research," she said.

"The institution... played a significant role in the country's history, education, democracy, and culture. It had a role in every important achievement of Bangladesh," the education minister added.

"We have been successful as an economy and now we want to improve

our higher education."

Dhaka University was established on July 1, 1921 with 12 departments, three faculties, 60 teachers, 877 students, three dorms and about 600 acres of land.

Its students and teachers sacrificed their lives in the 1952 language movement, 1969 mass upsurge, 1971 Liberation War, and 1990 anti-autocracy movement.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Akhtaruzzaman presided over the programme. Pro-VCs ASM Maksud Kamal and Mohammad Samad and convener of the event organising committee Prof Imtiaz Ahmed spoke.

Provide security to presiding officer

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attended the virtual proceeding and said he and his family members had been in fear since Wednesday afternoon, when he was called in to Daulatdia Police Station and forced to sign some papers, Supreme Court lawyer Ishrat Hasan told The Daily Star.

Shajahan prayed to the HC to save him and his family members, the lawyer added.

Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi told The Daily Star that the HC bench ordered the IGP to take the steps needed to provide security to Shajahan and his family members until January 25 when another HC bench is scheduled to

hear a contempt of court rule against the superintendent of police, Tanvir Arafath.

According to media reports, Mohsin went to the polling centre at Bheramara Pilot Model High School after receiving complaints of voter fraud and was talking to presiding officer Shajahan when SP Arafath, ASP Mostafizur Rahman, and several other policemen went there and loudly called the presiding officer aside.

Mohsin then told the policemen that he was a judicial magistrate and requested them to let him speak to the presiding officer, the reports said.

SP Arafath then called the magistrate impolite and asked him to leave the premises, according to the reports.

Mohsin later filed a complaint with the Election Commission, Registrar General's Office of the Supreme Court, law and home ministries, and the office of Inspector General of Police, accusing the SP of serious misconduct, reports our correspondent in Kushtia.

The SP's conduct during the polls was a blatant violation of the Local Government Election Rules, 2010, the complaint said.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khizir Hayat on Wednesday issued a contempt of court rule against SP Arafath.

The bench also directed him to appear at the court in person on January 25 and place his explanation of the event.

The bench observed that the SP had not only committed serious contempt of court but also tarnished the image of the judiciary as a whole.

"The action of the superintendent of police... cannot be taken lightly," the HC said in a suo moto order. "The behaviour and the attitude... of the police to an officer of the judiciary who is performing the judicial functions as per the provisions of law under the guidance of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh amount to serious contempt of court."

"Such behaviour of the said superintendent of police, Kushtia, is a severe attack to the administration of justice and ultimately the entire judiciary."

Preparations on to reopen schools on a limited scale

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reopening schools and the pandemic situation.

The country's educational institutions remain shut since March 17 due to the pandemic. The closure has been extended till January 30.

Speaking at a press conference on December 29, Dipu Moni said they are planning to bring the class-10

and class-12 students back to schools and colleges. The students will take next year's SSC and HSC exams.

Classes for SSC candidates will be held from February to April and for HSC students from February to May.

She said the government was planning to hold the SSC exams in June and the HSC exams in July or

August, given that the pandemic situation doesn't deteriorate. Usually, the SSC exams start on February 1 and the HSC on April 1 every year.

The exams will be held on reduced syllabuses.

A top National Curriculum and Textbook Board official yesterday said they have completed the work on reducing the syllabuses and

submitted those to the education ministry.

"We cannot tell what percentage of the syllabus has been reduced. We have cut the syllabus keeping in mind the issue of ensuring minimum basic competence of students for continuation of education in their next classes," NCTB Chairman Prof Narayan Chandra Saha said.

Pre-historic

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professor in European Prehistory, told AFP the research was based on a new methodology he had developed "that is more attuned to how people would weigh items in the Bronze Age."

He and his co-author Catalin Popa studied more than 5,000 objects from over 100 ancient hoards.

Rather than measuring the items by weighing scales alone, they statistically compared their weight using a psychology principle known as the "Weber fraction."

This quantifies the concept that if objects are similar enough in mass, people weighing them by hand can't tell the difference.

They found that around 70 percent of rings, which averaged around 195 grams, were similar enough in weight to have been indistinguishable by hand.

These pieces aren't the world's oldest money by a long way -- people in Mesopotamia developed coins some 5,000 years ago -- but Kuijpers said the methodology devised could have wider uses for investigating objects of the ancient world.

As to how much each individual object might be worth in today's money and what items they might have been used to buy -- cattle, weapons, etc -- it's impossible to know for certain.

But "it's a material that they really think that they valued a lot, that much is clear," said Kuijpers.

BCL leader

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A couple, who also rented the house and lives there, caught Himel red-handed when he was keeping a camera in their room early Wednesday for taking footage of the couple's private moments.

Later, the house owner and other tenants checked his mobile phone and found several videos of the house owner's daughter bathing.

Police arrested Himel from the house on Wednesday night.

Sheikh Rizaul Haque Dipu, officer-in-charge of Mirzapur Police Station, told The Daily Star that Himel admitted the offence during interrogation. Later, he was sent to jail through a court after the victim lodged a case against him under the Digital Security Act, he added.

Meanwhile, Mirzapur upazila unit BCL President Saddam Hossain and General Secretary Saiful Islam in a press release yesterday said Himel was suspended.

A recommendation was made to the central BCL to expel him from the organisation, the release said.

Death toll in Madrid building blast rises to four

AFP, Madrid

The toll from a powerful explosion caused by a gas leak that gutted a building in a residential part of Madrid rose to four yesterday after a priest died from his injuries.

The 36-year-old, who was ordained a priest last June, was one of the 11 people who were injured during Wednesday's blast in the La Latina district.

He died in hospital in the early hours of yesterday, the Madrid archdiocese said in a statement.

The building belonging to the Church of the Virgin de la Paloma and San Pedro el Real located next-door, was completely destroyed in the blast.

Two men who were walking in the street and a repairman who was fixing the building's boiler on the fifth floor when the blast occurred also died.

Officials had originally reported that an 85-year-old woman had died but they later said the victim was a man.

A man who was initially reported as missing was later confirmed to be the repairman who died in the blast, a father of four, government representative Jose Manuel Franco told radio Cadena Ser.