



COVID-19 VACCINE ACC to probe Tk 22,000cr 'graft' scheme Official says Beximco, others involved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has launched an investigation into an alleged Tk 22,000 crore corruption scheme involving Beximco Pharma's Vice-chairman Salman F Rahman and former health minister Zahid Maleque over the procurement of Covid-19 vaccines.

A four-member probe team, led by Deputy Director Afroza Haque Khan, was formed after initial evidence of irregularities and graft was found in intelligence inquiries, ACC Director General Md Akhtar Hossain told reporters at its headquarters yesterday.

Other team members are Assistant Director Bilkis Akter, deputy assistant directors Md Jewel Rana, and Kazi Hafizur Rahman. They already started collecting relevant documents, sources said.

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COMMUNAL HARMONY... A monk distributes tokens to fasting individuals who have gathered for the iftar offered at the Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery in Bashabo Sabujbagh, Dhaka. For more than a decade, these monks have been serving impoverished fasting Muslims during Ramadan, setting an inspiring example of interfaith harmony. The photo was taken on Sunday afternoon.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Conspiracy unfolding against BNP, Bangladesh Warns Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday warned that a new conspiracy is unfolding by a vested group against the BNP, the country's democracy, and the very existence and sovereignty of Bangladesh.

"Those of us involved in politics have been talking about a plot for the past few days. A plot is once again unfolding. We are not saying this merely as political rhetoric or to attract people's attention. Genuinely, a serious conspiracy is gradually being hatched against Bangladesh's existence, sovereignty, and democracy," he said while virtually addressing an iftar event.



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ATTACKS ON JULY UPRISERS DU suspends 128 students

A CORRESPONDENT, DU

Dhaka University yesterday suspended 128 students over their alleged involvement in attacks on protesters during the student-led mass uprising from July 15 to August 5 on the university campus.

The decision was made at a syndicate meeting based on the report of a fact-finding committee formed to investigate the attacks.

A new probe committee has also been formed to further scrutinise the initial report to finalise a decision regarding the punishment of the students.

The committee, led by syndicate member Professor Tajmeri SA Islam, includes DU Faculty of Arts Dean Mohammad Siddiqui Rahman Khan, Sir AF Rahman Hall Provost Kazi Mahfuzul Islam Supon, DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed and others.

The suspension is not being considered a punishment, but a "measure" to ensure further investigations are conducted without interruption, according to Kazi Mahfuzul Islam Supon, convener of the fact-finding committee.

"The number of attackers mentioned in the fact-finding report is more than 128. The syndicate decided to suspend 128 DU students initially. A new probe committee has been formed to scrutinise the fact-finding report. The final decision on their punishment will come after the new committee submits its report," Supon told The Daily Star.

On March 13, when the fact-finding committee handed over the report to the DU vice-chancellor, Supon had told reporters that 122 DU students were found to be involved in the attacks.

The suspended students are reportedly affiliated with the banned student organisation Chhatra League. However, their names and identities could not be immediately confirmed.

Asked about the involvement of teachers, DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said a separate committee is investigating their role in the attack.

Further action will be taken once their report is submitted.

DMP chief regrets remarks on 'rape'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

D h a k a
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Md Sajjat



Ali has expressed regret over his recent remarks regarding rape, following widespread criticism.

In an official statement issued yesterday, the DMP commissioner said, "While discussing violence against women and children, I referred to rape as part of a broader spectrum of abuse. If my statement has hurt anyone, I sincerely regret it."

The statement was signed by Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media and public relations) of the DMP.

The apology came in response to backlash over the commissioner's comments at a recent event, where he reportedly suggested media to use alternative terminology for rape, stating that the word sounds "unpleasant".

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AL govt sought to pour Tk 277cr in a flop app

Nasrul Hamid's son has stakes in 'Binimoy,'
a mobile financial service

MAHMUDUL HASAN

When a failed project drains public funds, common sense dictates its cancellation. But the Awami League government's response was to spend even more on it.

This is exactly what happened with Binimoy, a platform that allowed transactions between mobile financial services (MFS) providers.

Zareef Hamid, the son of Nasrul Hamid, the former state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, has a significant stake in Binimoy, which was launched in November 2022 by Sajeeb Wazed Joy, the son of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and also her ICT Adviser.

To develop the platform, the ICT Division signed a Tk 54.95 crore deal with a consortium of three companies: Velwire, Microsoft Bangladesh and Orion Informatics.

Zareef is the founder and chief executive officer of Velwire, and Zarif Munir, the son of Muhammad Zamir, the chairman of the Awami League's international affairs sub-committee, was part of the Velwire team.

However, Binimoy proved to

be an abysmal failure, with an alarming error rate of 25-40 percent, leading to widespread customer dissatisfaction, according to assessments by the ICT Division.

A failure rate of less than 1 percent is the industry benchmark for a transaction app.

"We have stopped it -- this was merely an attempt to loot public money."

Faiz Taiyeb Ahmad
Special assistant to CA

Only nine banks, three MFS providers and two payment service providers offered services through the platform.

And yet, the previous government intended to spend Tk 277 crore until 2029 to "upgrade" the app to make it "sustainable", according to the development project proposal prepared by the ICT Division's Bangladesh Computer Council.

"We have stopped it -- this was

merely an attempt to loot public money," said Faiz Taiyeb Ahmad, the special assistant to the chief adviser with executive authority over posts, telecom and ICT ministry.

After developing the platform, the ICT division handed it over to the Bangladesh Bank for rolling out to customers.

Then in January 2024, the central bank signed a deal with two private firms to maintain and operate Binimoy, with one of them being Velwire.

The ICT Division's designs for Binimoy did not stop there.

It wanted all banks and financial institutions to be integrated into the platform, according to the document.

Not only that, but government bill payment, salary disbursement, benefit distribution, tax and VAT collection, pension payment, subsidies and metro rail card recharges were supposed to be processed through Binimoy.

The target was to connect over 100 institutions to the platform.

This meant that 50 percent of the platform's earnings would go to private companies despite being fully developed with public funds.

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Rohingya man killed in Ukhiya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya man was attacked and killed allegedly by ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) men at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar's Ukhiya upazila on Sunday.

The deceased is Md Harun, 32, a resident of Block E-3 in Hakimpara camp.

Police have arrested one person, Badshah Mia, in connection with the incident. The arrestee is also a resident of the same camp.

The attack took place last evening at Block E-3 of Hakimpara refugee camp (Camp-14) in Ukhiya, said Ukhiya Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Arif Hossain.

The OC said Harun was a Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) member.

According to police and Rohingya community leaders, Harun had left ARSA to join RSO a few months ago. They suspect this was the reason for the attack.

The body has been sent to the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, said the OC.

He added that an operation was underway to arrest the remaining perpetrators.

Putin, Trump to discuss Ukraine Kyiv launches drone attack on Russian energy site

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Donald Trump will speak by phone today, as one US official expressed hope the two could agree a Ukraine ceasefire within weeks.

Trump said earlier "a lot of work" had been done between the United States and Russia on settling the three-year Ukraine conflict, and that there was a "very good chance" hostilities would end.

Putin said last week he agreed with the idea of a ceasefire but warned he had "serious questions" about how it would be implemented that he wanted to discuss with Trump.

Kyiv has agreed to the ceasefire, while its European allies have criticised Putin for not committing to an unconditional and immediate halt in fighting, with the UK accusing the Russian leader of "dragging his feet".

"There is such a conversation being prepared for Tuesday," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters including AFP ahead of the Trump Putin call, without commenting on what the two leaders would discuss.

Trump said the two would discuss "land" and power plants: an apparent reference to the Moscow-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in south Ukraine.

Russia occupies swathes of southern and eastern Ukraine.

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Hamza Choudhury soaks in the adulation of fans at the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet, en route to his ancestral home in Habiganj, after his long-awaited homecoming yesterday. Hamza, a Bangladeshi born English footballer who plays for Sheffield United in England, is set to make his Bangladesh debut in the Asian Cup Qualifiers against India in Shillong on March 25.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

We will win
against India
and progress:
Hamza

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PRAYER TIMING MARCH 18					
Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4:49	12:45	4:30	6:09	7:45	
JAMAAT 4:59	1:15	4:45	6:24	8:15	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					
SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING					
RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR		
17	18			6:09	
18	19	4:47	6:10		
19	20	4:46	6:10		