

## Haji Selim, 3 others arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Awami League lawmaker Haji Mohammad Selim was arrested along with three other persons yesterday morning from Zia International Airport (ZIA) area.

Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested them under Section 54 of the CrPC when they went there to receive AL President and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Police also seized Selim's licensed pistol although he showed a photocopy of the licence.

The others arrested with him are Farhad Ahmed Saleh, Md Wahiduzzaman and driver of his car Mobarak Hossain.

The team led by Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Ruhul Amin stopped Selim's car when it reached the airport intersection at about 6:30am. They arrested

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## Sechchasebok Dal leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Unidentified persons shot dead Masudur Rahman Masud, general secretary of Fatullah thana unit of BNP-backed Sechchasebok Dal, yesterday evening.

Masud, 30, was killed inside a shop at Aliganj on the bank of river Buriganga.

Witnesses said a gang of about 15 came there in a boat and shot him indiscriminately, leaving him dead on the spot.

The victim's family members alleged that supporters of Palash, president of Fatullah thana unit of Awami League-backed Sramik League, are involved in the killing. Palash was arrested one month ago and is now in jail.

Sources said there was a feud between Palash and Masud for long centring local politics and also collection of sand from the Buriganga. Following the killing, supporters of Masud attacked and ransacked Palash's house at Fatullah. Some of them also fired shots.

Police recovered Masud's body and kept it at the thana.

No case was filed and none was arrested in this connection till the filing of this report at about 9 last night.

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PHOTO: STAR

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji jointly inaugurate Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday.

## Beijing will remain a trusted friend: Zhu

M ANWARUL HAQ

Visiting Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji yesterday said whatever changes take place in the international scenario, his country will continue to be a close, reliable and trusted friend of Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh is an old and tested friend. We value immensely our ties with your country", the Chinese premier said at a ceremony marking inauguration of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city. The Centre has been built with Chinese financial and technical assistance.

Zhu termed the magnificent Centre "a symbol of the lasting friendship" between the two countries.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia paid tributes to the Chinese engineers and technicians for their hard work, creativity and dedication in constructing the Centre. She said, under Chinese assistance, nine projects have

been completed and another eight are under implementation.

After brief speeches by the two prime ministers, hand-over of the Centre to Bangladesh and plaque opening ceremony was completed.

Hundreds of school children, members of the Cabinet, diplomats and other dignitaries were present at the inaugural ceremony, held under the open sky at the sprawling lush green lawn of the Centre with a splendid water fountain adding to its attractions.

Built at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, it is a world class convention Centre and banquet facility that sprawls over 19,926 square feet.

It has been built with an interest-free loan of 100 million Chinese RMB (around 20 million US dollars). The Centre was built for hosting the NAM Summit this year but Bangladesh later decided not to host it.

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## SPA unlikely to go soon

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Despite Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's promise to repeal or initiate the process of repealing all black laws including the Special Powers Act (SPA) within the first 100 days of the four-party alliance government, the Act is unlikely to be scrapped soon.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday the government has decided to scrap SPA, but due to the complex nature of this 28-year old law, it cannot be done soon.

"Time will tell when we will be able to scrap the SPA," he said. "We are now scrutinising similar types of

laws in our neighbouring countries including India."

Early last week, the ruling party however approved in principle repeal of the Public Safety Act (PSA), 2000, introduced by the AL government.

Ironically, the government applied the PSA on top Awami League leaders Motia Chowdhury and Mohammad Nasim on Thursday, once again reminding the people what these black laws stand for.

The SPA, which remains a weapon of any government to detain anyone disliked by it, was used even yesterday to detain former Awami League lawmaker Haji Selim.

Though the decision on scrapping SPA is clear, the government has also decided to retain some parts of it dealing with sabotage, smuggling, black marketing and issues related with economic offence, and make a new law.

So far, the government has not initiated the process of repealing SPA. Earlier, it was said that a draft bill for repeal of it would be placed in the parliament in its second session due to begin on January 31. However, there is no possibility of placing it in the second session or even in the third session, Law Ministry sources said.

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## Hasina at ZIA Are we under martial law ?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader in the parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday blasted the government for what she termed repression on opposition workers and wondered whether martial law has been imposed in the country.

"Has martial law been imposed in the country? Are we in a democracy or under military rule?" an angry Hasina said after her party workers were barred from reaching the Zia International Airport to receive her yesterday. "Do they (the government) want to stop free movement of the people? They've no right to do this. Why are they so afraid if they are confident that the people had voted them to power?"

The AL chief returned home yesterday morning after spending 35 days in the US and the UK. She made an impromptu address to the crowd that gathered outside the airport premises despite the police restriction. She also replied to reporters' queries at the arrival lounge.

Hasina asked her party men to get ready for putting up resistance against the 'repressive government'.

Replying to a query, she said, "There is no security of my life. They (the government) want something to happen to me. They're already killing the people of the country."

She said filing cases and repression cannot silence people's voices. "If necessary, I am ready to shed my blood to protect the hard-earned democracy."

She expressed her firm belief that the days of the 'repressors' are numbered. She thanked the people for gathering at the airport despite police barricades.

Referring to the post-polls oppression on the people 'let loose by the government', Hasina wailed that even the harassed are unable to file cases.

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## HC grants bail to Nasim, Motia, Saber

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday granted bail to three former ministers of the past Awami League government and an AL leader in two cases involving violence and misappropriation.

They are former Home Minister Mohammad Nasim, Agriculture Minister Motia Chowdhury, Deputy Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury and BMA Secretary General Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin.

Following separate anticipatory bail petitions, a division bench of

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## Police prevent AL supporters from welcoming Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major move to stamp down opposition political activities, hundreds of police were mobilised to prevent the supporters of Awami League (AL) to reach the ZIA to welcome the party leader Sheikh Hasina returning after a month-long trip abroad.

The entire airport zone became a *khaki* area of political control with law enforcers from various agencies on a major offensive to prevent a show of strength by the opposition party supporters. Ultimately, it turned out to be a show of strength for the police and other forces. Roads were declared off-limits to the AL followers and the objective seemed to be to ensure a crowdless welcome to Hasina. She flew back home by British Airways from London at 7:45am, an hour behind schedule.

Hundreds of policemen tried everything to make it as difficult as possible for opposition activists to reach the airport. Barbed wire fences were raised on main city road junctures and paramilitary BDR forces questioned public transport passengers if they were going to the airport.

Except for MPs and journalists, police halted all other people who said they were proceeding towards the airport to receive Hasina.

When security personnel at the ZIA refused to let senior AL leaders including ex-ministers to enter the airport's VIP Lounge, the AL leaders Abdus Samad Azad and Zillur Rahman phoned BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury for intervention but the requests were denied.

A few AL leaders who had gained access to the VIP Lounge left out of protest. Sheikh Hasina walked down the staircase towards the arrival lounge and then to the VIP lounge all by herself with only Dhaka Mayor Mohammad Hanif and a cluster of journalists accompany her.

"Has martial law been promulgated in the country? Are we in a democracy or under martial law?" a visibly disturbed Hasina said in her first reaction after returning home after a 35-day private tour of the US and UK.

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PHOTO: STAR

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addresses a gathering in the Zia International Airport area after flying back home from London yesterday.

## Shahriar's detention illegal, declares HC

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday declared the detention of writer and journalist Shahriar Kabir illegal as it delivered the judgement on a writ challenging the government order.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohammad Hamidul Haque and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana delivered the judgement after a long hearing on the writ moved by Barrister M Amirul Islam.

The court order, however, would not bring him out of the grill since the detainee also faces a sedition case.

Deputy Attorney General Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan stood for the state. The High Court earlier issued a rule asking the government to show cause why the detention order of the journalist under the Special Powers Act should not be declared illegal.

Shahriar Kabir was arrested from Zia International Airport on his arrival

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## Alam murder Farida placed on fresh remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Farida, one of the housemaids of murdered industrialist Mohammad Alam, arrested earlier in connection with the murder of Alam and three other housemaids, was placed yesterday on a fresh two-day remand for interrogation by the Detective Branch of police.

After completion of a two-day remand in the second phase, she was produced before the CMM's court, Dhaka, with a prayer for a five-day remand while no further remand prayers were made for

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