

Hasina to fly home

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Leading politicians of AL and BNP are seeing the filing of the case against AL President Sheikh Hasina as not only a mere lawsuit but as 'a major political development' in light of the changed political situation in the country.

"There is off course a political motive behind filing such a case in the present context," said a leading politician yesterday preferring not to be named and adding, "There were scopes for filing such a case during the last five years of BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government's regimes, so it's a threat to top level politicians."

"Awami League President Sheikh Hasina is a VIP, so the government is considering initiation of an investigation of the case under the National Task Force," Matin told journalists yesterday.

The investigation officer of the case Jane Alam, who is also the officer-in-charge of Tejgaon police station told The Daily Star last evening that he had talked to the complainant Kazi Tajul Islam Faruque yesterday and the day before as part of the inquiry.

But, the Daily Star failed to reach Faruque despite repeated efforts to contact him. A family source said the complainant is not interested to talk to the media about the case. They requested the correspondent to give Faruque some time to cool down following a seemingly tense situation he is in right now.

The family source however said although the case was filed on Monday, Faruque had been staying away from the family for the previous three days without letting them know where he had been staying.

He returned home only after filing of the case on Monday afternoon, family sources said. Meanwhile, police have been deployed at the Gulshan residence of Faruque.

As a state of emergency is in effect in the country with a ban on indoor politics, most politicians including leading AL members preferred to refrain from talking to the media about the case, but some of the leaders seeking anonymity said they believe the move was made against Hasina in a bid to kick the current chiefs of AL and BNP out of politics.

A top BNP leader told The Daily Star seeking anonymity that the filing of the case against Sheikh Hasina is not a mere incident, rather it is a significant political development.

The BNP leader said cases can be filed against anyone if there are allegations, but filing a case against such a top politician who is a former prime minister requires rigorous political deliberation on the part of the government regarding whether it will allow it.

Since the ongoing drive against high-profile suspected corrupt politicians started in the first week of February, the country has been ripe with speculation that the interim government will ultimately create an atmosphere where the current chiefs of the two major political parties -- AL and BNP will have no choice but to quit politics and go to self exile.

The speculation was buttressed by Law Adviser Barrister Mainul Hosein's comment on April 4 that the caretaker government is not interested in holding any election keeping the current leaders of different political parties in place and that the government is especially interested to put an end to dynastic politics.

"We want good new leadership to emerge instead of the old ones," he said after a meeting with the chief election commissioner at the Election Commission Secretariat.

Within five days of the law adviser's comment leaders of different political parties yesterday said they are trying to find out whether there is any link between the comment and the filing of the extortion case against Sheikh Hasina.

Communication Adviser Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin who is also the chairman of the National Coordination Committee against major corruption and crimes clarified the government's position about the case yesterday and said there was no political motive behind it.

Asked whether the case has any link with the law adviser's recent comment, Matin said it seems that the government had no such plan.

But some politicians think that the case is an 'open threat' to Sheikh Hasina to keep her in exile and at the same time a pressure on Khaleda Zia so that she also gets ready to face the same fate.

As the date for Hasina's return was getting closer, whether the AL chief will be allowed to come back home and at the same time whether the BNP chairperson will be forced to go on exile, were the most talked about topics in the country.

Some influential leaders of AL told The Daily Star last night that they think Hasina should come back home quickly no matter what is the plot behind the case. They said they have already conveyed their suggestion to Hasina. "We have information that our party chief will fight the case after she returns home as early as possible," said an AL leader.

Hasina, who had attended the oath taking ceremony of the present caretaker government led by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed and openly supported many moves of the government, especially the drive against corruption, made some comments on April 7 criticising the non-party government and the Election Commission for 'delaying' the next general election on 'different pretexts' terming the interim administration 'undemocratic' and unconstitutional.

Some AL leaders said the harsh comments by Hasina might haveirked the government to the point where it might allow such a case against her to stand.

Few influential AL leaders see a 'designed structure and sequences' flowing through the incident of filing of

GARO LEADER'S DEATH Environmental group demands judicial probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) yesterday demanded immediate judicial inquiry into the killing of Choles Ritchil, a leader of the Garos in Modhupur forest area.

BEN in a press release also demanded punishment of the killers. "We condemn this killing in the strongest terms possible and urge the government to scrap the Modhupur Eco Park project."

Expressing concern over the mistreatment of ethnic minorities, BEN said such mistreatment can create grave security problems and the country's experience in Chittagong Hill Tracts amply illustrates this point.

A network of pro-environment Bangladeshis worldwide, BEN also questioned the motive of the joint forces in arresting Ritchil and subjecting him to such inhumane torture.

AWARDS

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De Villiers

FROM PAGE 16

was a blessing in disguise for South Africa. Kallis, walking in to bat, was in a belligerent mood. On occasion Kallis can be dour and defensive, but on Tuesday he was hell-bent on imposing himself on the opposition.

He set the ball rolling with a classic pull shot against Collymore, rolling his wrists beautifully over the ball and keeping it down.

"We would like the authorities to look carefully into whether there was any influence of these vested interest groups on the course of events leading to Ritchil's death preceded by the death of another Garo leader Piren Snal on January 3 in 2004."

The use of torture is a grave crime and it violates the fundamental rights protected by the constitution of Bangladesh. The UN Convention also prohibits torture. The operations by the joint forces to combat corruption and restore law and order must be carried out by following internationally recognised norms to uphold human rights, BEN noted.

Choles Ritchil was the leader of the Garo movement against the ill-conceived Modhupur Eco Park project, under which a wall is being constructed around 3,000 acres of the Modhupur forest.

According to most observers, the wall will basically destroy the forest and disrupt the livelihood of the indigenous people including the Garos, who live in the area and depend on the forest for their livelihood.

Ritchil took up the leadership after Piren Snal, the previous leader of the Garo movement against the Modhupur Eco Park project, was killed on January 3, 2004 when police fired on a peaceful demonstration against the project. The firing also caused injuries to twenty-five people including women and children, the press release said.

"We tried to bring many reforms to our party before and some of those are yet to be implemented for many reasons," said an AL leader adding that party reform is a continuous process and still there are chances to reform.

About the caretaker government's penchant for changing the topmost leader of the party, the most common view among the top and mid-level AL leaders is that the matter absolutely depends on the party activists and leaders and that is real democracy.

Following the filing of the case against Hasina, leaders, activists and supporters of AL across the country are in a panic and in deep doubt about the fate of their party chief and about the rumours surrounding her, said a close aide to Hasina. "Many grassroots level leaders have contacted us, we suggested them to remain united and not to be scared. We will take a stand together to face any conspiracy against us," said the AL leader.

AL terms case

FROM PAGE 1
could not establish any allegation of financial corruption against her during the last five years," the statement said.

Hasina even donated her ancestral property for the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, it added.

"No conscious person of the country will ever believe in the case filed [against Hasina] for extorting from a person nine years ago," Zillur and Jalil said.

They said the "false" case was filed against the AL president with an "ill motive" to tarnish her political image.

Spirited Tigers

FROM PAGE 16
The expectations are high in the country after Sunday's glorious triumph, but the players should prove their consistency to keep up the momentum, with everything depending on the batsmen.

Mohammed Ashraf hopped the spotlight after a long time, and no doubt everybody expects another spark from the little man beside the other top order batsmen to see Bangladesh at their best.

Bangladesh's left-spinning trio -- Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak and Shakib Al Hasan -- already proved that they have the ability to bamboozle the English, who hardly have a reputation of feeling comfortable against the slow bowlers.

Unlike the slow and wicket at the Providence in Georgetown where the spinners thrived, the wicket at the Kensington Oval will offer some bounce but expected to be more favourable to batsmen.

Police force

FROM PAGE 16

He also lauded the force's active participation in the United Nations Peacekeeping missions and said that they have been commended worldwide for their work in Sierra Leone, Liberia and East Timor, among others.

Fakhruddin also presented Bangladesh Police Medal, the highest national police award, and the President Police Medal awards to the winners.

Earlier, the CA received salutes from a combined parade of Rab, armed police, police of Dhaka and Rajshahi ranges, combined police ranges, railway and highway police, DMP, CMP, combined metropolitan police and Mohila police.

The parade was also attended by Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad, caretaker government advisers, chiefs of army, navy and air forces, diplomats, senior civil and military officials and distinguished personalities.

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Some influential persons close to the 'authorities' had started 'negotiations' in this regard. Khaleda told them she might leave the country with all her family members, including her elder son and BNP Senior Secretary General Tarique Rahman, arrested on March 7, the sources said.

The former communications minister was widely accused of making huge money through corruption relating to CNG-run autorickshaws and allocation of land for filling stations during the tenure of the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government.

Huda even allotted a costly piece of Bangladesh Railway land in the heart of the city for his wife's human rights organisation at a nominal price.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reported that Special Judge Abdul Quddus Mia passed the order to attach Osman's properties in connection with a graft case filed on April 4 by the Anti-Corruption Commission as he did not submit his and family members' wealth statement within the commission time frame.

The court fixed April 15 for next hearing of the case.

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