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Khaleda agrees to fly out with Arafat

Tarique may join them later

REZAUL KARIM

After a prolonged suspense, former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia finally agreed to leave the country under tremendous pressure from the military backed caretaker government and on condition that her sons will also be allowed to join her.

Her younger son Arafat Rahman will be going with her and the elder son Tarique Rahman will join them later on, a highly placed source in the government told The Daily Star last night on condition of anonymity.

"She will be leaving the country for Saudi Arabia in a couple of days. Initially she will be leaving with a one-month visa to perform umrah and her permanent residence there

will be finalised upon reaching the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the source said.

"Everything has been finalised...now only the formalities including getting a visa remain to be completed, which might be completed in a day," the source added.

Replying to a question, he said Arafat Rahman was not shown arrested officially because a process was on to persuade Khaleda to leave the country. "She was determined not to leave the country, but finally agreed when her family members including her younger brother Major (ret'd) Syeed Iskandar persuaded her to agree to leave yesterday evening."

The decision to produce Arafat Rahman before a court last evening

was dropped after Khaleda Zia had agreed to leave the country. Arafat was picked up by the joint forces late night on Sunday.

It was learnt that Arafat was



taken to her mother's Moinul Hossain Road residence in Dhaka Cantonment immediately after Khaleda agreed to leave the country last evening. Later at night he



was reportedly released. He was taken away by the joint forces from the same house on Sunday.

Khaleda, however, bargained for Tarique Rahman's release and asked the authorities concerned to allow him to go with her, but the authorities told her that he might be sent to Saudi Arabia very soon for 'treatment'.

Another highly placed source said the Saudi government agreed to play host to Khaleda and her family if she leaves Bangladesh willingly. "The message was conveyed to the Saudi government through its embassy in Dhaka that she agreed to leave the country," he added.

Initially, she will be staying in a government house in Saudi Arabia and later will be provided with

proper accommodations so that she can live there with her two sons, their wives, and her three grandchildren.

Since the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11 and the subsequent assumption of power by the military backed caretaker government headed by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, sending of the two chiefs of major political parties Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to exiles has been a much talked about issue.

The highly placed source also confirmed that Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, who is now on a private visit to the USA, finally will not be allowed to return home.

Hasina left for the US on March

Arafat released after quizzing over graft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Arafat Rahman, younger son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, was released last night after intelligence officials interrogated him about his and his aides' alleged involvement in fetching a huge amount of money from different sectors by using clout.

Intelligence sources said the joint forces arrested Arafat, nicknamed Coco, after they found evidence of his involvement with corruption.

Joint forces arrested Arafat at 1:10am yesterday and quizzed him since his arrest. He was neither handed over to police nor produced before a court as of 10:00pm.

The sources also said Arafat was grilled about a string of issues including his control over setting up advertisement billboards in the

capital through his advertisement firm Advance Ad, his local and foreign bank accounts and investments.

Advance Ad allegedly monopolised outdoor advertisement by using political clout and deprived the Dhaka City Corporation of huge amount of revenues.

Last month, the office of the firm was raided twice.

Intelligence officials also questioned him about his dubious links with Ali Asghar Lobi while he was the chairman of the cricket development committee.

They also quizzed him over his business establishment Rahman Navigations and its control over Dhaka-Barisal and other launch routes across Bangladesh.

He was asked about his brother Tarique Rahman, senior joint

CRISIS AT TITAS GAS FIELD

Blowout barely averted at enormous gas loss

SHARIER KHAN

The 38-year old third well of the country's biggest gas provider Titas Gas Field in Brahmanbaria yesterday went totally out of control with an uncontrolled release of gas at the rate of 15 to 18 million cubic feet a day (mmcf/d), highly placed sources said.

Bapex, which was inappropriately assigned by the authorities last month to fix the uncontrolled leakage of gas, barely saved the field from a devastating blow out by burning this gas. Earlier, Bapex was trying to remove anomalies in this well.

"This gas will continue to burn for at least another month to 45 days even if we are able to enforce the fastest remedial measure," noted a well-placed source.

Fifteen other wells of this field are however still in operation.

"What a wastage! This could have been easily avoided had the authorities paid proper attention to early warnings in the media and deployed a world class operator to solve the field's problems," the source said.

The Daily Star has been reporting on an impending disaster in the

No more duty-free cars for MPs

Advisers' council cancels system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The council of advisers yesterday cancelled the lawmakers' privilege of importing duty-free cars as most members of parliament (MPs) in the past misused it.

The move would ensure equal rights of all citizens, said the finance ministry proposal placed before the council's weekly meeting.

At least 303 cars were imported by the lawmakers from 2001 to 2006, during the period of the eighth parliament, under the duty-

free scheme due to which the government lost around Tk 211 crore in taxes, sources said.

Most of the imported cars are very luxurious and their tax ranged from 73.91 per cent to 196.10 per cent, the finance ministry notified the advisory council meeting.

The MPs were provided with the privilege to import duty-free cars on May 24, 1988 during IM Ershad's rule. The provision was later amended on August 28, 2002, with retrospective effect from July 1 the same year.

JUDICIARY SEPARATION

Govt given 3 weeks for the last time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday granted the government three weeks for the last time to complete the separation process of the judiciary.

Granting the time, Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin said, "...this is (time extension) for the last time."

A seven-member full bench of the SC headed by the chief justice also directed the government to inform it about the completion of the process by May 6 and fixed May

How he monopolised outdoor ad business

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

Khaleda Zia's younger son Arafat Rahman, detained late Sunday night, had allegedly used his family clout to monopolise the outdoor advertising industry and push through controversial state contracts for commissions during the tenure of BNP-led alliance government.

Between 2001 and 2006, his firm Advance Ad grabbed the city's most lucrative advertisement spots owned by the government agencies, said sources. It bagged nearly

80 percent of Dhaka's Tk 150-crore-a-year outdoor ad business.

Fearful of repercussions, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and other government agencies catered to Arafat's whim throughout the tenure of the last BNP-led government.

ADCC official seeking anonymity yesterday told The Daily Star that the corporation's advertisement cell has been closed down to get rid of the files that might implicate him in the irregularities regarding allotment of advertisement spots.

Business sources said that for

most of the time they had no option but to hire the Advance Ad, fearing that otherwise they might fall out of favour with the government.

The firm made the most in profits during the capital's beautification in the lead-up to the 2005 Saarc summit. Under the facelift project, it had numerous billboards, unipoles, and neon signs along the road between the Zia International Airport and Bangla Motor Crossing. The stretch included some of the city's most noticeable spots like those at Jahangir Gate, Mohakhali Rail

Hill demolished to create officials' housing plots

District admin bypasses rules, ignores forest dept's protest

RASHIDUL HASAN

An ecologically critical hill near Cox's Bazar beach has been levelled and its trees worth a few hundred crores of taka have been cut down and sold by the district administration to prepare residential plots for bureaucrats.

The hill had been under the jurisdiction of the forest department since 1935 before the district administration took it over.

The 51 acre of what was once a forest is now a vast expanse of flat exposed earth after the district administration decided to turn the hill into a residential area defying the forest department's objection in a meeting just four days before the first of the series of recent caretaker governments took over the reign of the country on October 29 last year.

As bulldozers rolled onto the hill bringing down trees, the forest department scrambled to save the greenery.



This government-declared 'Ecologically Critical Area' in Kolatoli, Cox's Bazar, is being prepared for residential plots by chopping down trees and flattening the hills.

Aussies on course

AFF, St George's

Australia were 114-2 after 20 overs in their World Cup Super Eight match against Sri Lanka at the Grenada National Stadium here on Monday chasing 227 to win.

Skipper Ricky Ponting was on 21 and Michael Clarke 15. The Aussies got off to a flying start with Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist producing 76 runs in 11.5 overs. In-form Hayden struck a brisk 40 off 30 balls that contained five fours and a couple of sixes while Gilchrist scored a 49-ball 30 before off-spinner Russel Arnold dismissed both the openers in successive overs.

Earlier, Brad Hogg took two key wickets as the world champions shot Sri Lanka out for 226.

The Lankans, after collapsing to 27 for three, saw captain Mahela Jayawardene (72) and Chamara Silva (64) put on 140 for the fourth wicket before both batsmen fell in quick succession to left-arm wrist spinner Hogg.

The former postman finished with two wickets for 35 runs from his 10 overs while left-arm quick Nathan Bracken did a superb job at both ends of the innings in a miserly return of four for 19 from

9.4 overs.

Sri Lanka, from 167 for three, lost their last seven wickets for 59 runs.

And it needed some determined tailend hitting from Malinga Bandara (17) and Farveez Maharoof, last man out for 25, to



Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist (L), Matthew Hayden (C) and captain Ricky Ponting celebrate the fall of Sri Lankan opener Upul Tharanga (not in picture) during the World Cup Super Eight match at the Grenada National Stadium in Saint George's yesterday.

Charges framed against 6 JMB cadres in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chittagong court yesterday framed charges against six Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) activists in four cases filed in connection with bomb attacks, murder, and possession of illegal firearms and explosives.

The accused include JMB bigwigs Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad and Zahid Hossain alias Bomb Mizan.

No more gunmen for anyone as situation improves

UNB, Dhaka

The government won't give police protection to any more persons as country's law and order situation is improving following the anticrime drives.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting of the advisory committee on law and order with Law Adviser Mainul Hossain in the chair.

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