

Advisers still deny plan to pack off two leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two influential advisers to the caretaker government yesterday categorically denied any government plan to keep two former prime ministers -- BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina -- out of the country. They also denied putting pressure on Khaleda and her sons to leave the country or having any understanding with them in this regard.

"There is no plan or pressure from the government side to send them abroad," Communications

Khaleda's departure likely in few days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The military-backed caretaker government has initiated moves to complete the formalities necessary for sending former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia abroad.

"She [Khaleda] may leave the country at any time in the next few days...The authorities will not make any delay in sending the former prime minister along with her family members to Saudi Arabia," said a highly placed source.

The source on condition of

anonymity told The Daily Star that there are a few necessary official formalities to complete as the implementation of the plan is linked to a foreign country.

"It may take five-six days to complete all the formalities with the Saudi government and other partners for making arrangements for the former prime minister's prolonged stay there," said the source.

Reliable sources said the government is trying to mobilise diplomatic as well as political support both at home and abroad so that no question arises in future about

sending Khaleda abroad.

They said for Khaleda's prolonged stay, the two governments need to settle some issues and reach a concrete understanding to be followed by both Bangladesh and Saudi authorities.

They said although Khaleda agreed to leave the country under pressure following hectic negotiations, she wants a concrete settlement about the fate of her elder son Tarique Rahman who is now in jail on an extortion charge.

Influential sources within the government said Khaleda wants to

AL asks govt for security on Hasina's return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) has urged the caretaker government to ensure security for its President Sheikh Hasina, who, according to the party, will return on April 23.

"This is to inform you that the Awami League president and daughter of Bangabandhu, Sheikh Hasina, will return home on April 23," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil in a letter to Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retired) MA Matin yesterday.

It should be mentioned here that the security personnel assigned to ensure protection for her were withdrawn immediately after she had left the country, the letter reads.

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Case against Tarique stayed for 6 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed for six months the proceedings of Tk 1 crore extortion case against former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman.

The HC bench that passed the order also rejected Tarique's bail prayer and issued a rule on the government asking it to explain within four weeks why the case against Tarique should not be quashed.

Advocate TH Khan moved for Tarique while Deputy Attorney General Abdur Rouf moved for the state in the case in which Tarique has been charged for extorting Tk 1

crore from Al-Amin Construction.

Owner of the construction firm Amin Ahmed, who got BNP nomination from Noakhali for the stalled January 22 election, filed the case against Tarique with Gulshan Police Station on March 8, a few hours after the joint forces arrested Tarique at his mother's Dhaka Cantonment residence.

Legal experts said if the government appeals in the Supreme Court for vacating the HC stay order and obtains it, the case may proceed again.

The investigation officer of the extortion case submitted the charge sheet against Tarique and his close aide Mian Nuruddin Apu on March 18.

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Strange PID advice for journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday sent a letter to all media outlets asking them not to publish or broadcast ill-motivated, harassing or misinformative reports about anybody.

"Recently we have noticed that some of the media are publishing or broadcasting dishonest and unprofessional political statements, satirical sketches, cartoons, features, etc, which are creating confusion among the people," said the letter signed by Iftekhar Hossain, principal information officer of the Press Information Department under the Ministry of Information.

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News analysis

Who's to be blamed for huge gas loss?

SHARIF KHAN

Around half a million dollars worth of natural gas is being wasted daily at the troubled third well of Titas Gas Field and the situation will remain unchanged for at least 45 more days even if a remedial measure is implemented in the shortest possible time.

Financially the situation will translate into a loss of Tk 1,575 crore or US\$ 22.5 million worth of precious energy resource of the country in just 45 days in the best case scenario.

The situation would not reach the current dire state had the energy ministry understood the

gravity of Titas Gas Field's problems as had been pointed out by eight energy experts in The Daily Star in early February. The Daily Star reports on the uncontrolled leakage of gas at Titas gave adequate warnings that the situation could lead to a blowout. The eight experts also submitted their report to Petrobangla with their opinions in early February.

The Daily Star quoted the experts, who requested anonymity, as saying that the government should immediately hire an experienced international contractor and a foreign expert who would guide the authorities into a proper course

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Gas burning at stunning rate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Gas is continuing to leak from the third well of Titas Gas Field in Brahmanbaria at an alarming rate of 15 to 18 million cubic feet a day (mmcf/d) maintaining the threat of a major blowout.

Vibration can be felt in the entire area as the gas with a deafening noise has been rushing out through four huge pipelines joined to the outlet pipeline nicknamed 'Christmas Tree'.

Gas is also leaking out through thousands of holes spread out in the area. Gas is even leaking through the River Titas and Loiska Beel.

Residents of nearby Shyampur and Anandapur villages have been living in fear of a looming catastrophe since the leakage turned worse.

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PHOTO: STAR

Gas rushing out and burning at the troubled third well of Titas Gas Field in Brahmanbaria yesterday. At least 12 to 16 million cubic feet of gas is being burnt a day.

EC to talk reforms with civil society on April 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will hold a dialogue with civil society groups on April 26 seeking opinions on the proposed electoral reforms.

"A daylong discussion will be held with civil society groups and personalities. Those who are involved in election-related activities will be invited to the discussion," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain told reporters at his office yesterday.

He hoped that a large number of civil society groups and personal-

ties will attend the discussion at the National Economic Council auditorium.

After the talks with the civil society groups and personalities, the EC will sit with the editors of different newspapers and senior journalists seeking their opinions on holding a free and fair election, Sakhawat said.

The EC, however, could not finalise the schedule for talks with political parties as the government is yet to decide about the withdrawal of restriction on indoor politics.

"We will sit with the political

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