

Court suspends

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responsible for that?" Asked about what she would do if she is allowed to return to Bangladesh, Hasina said, "I will place myself before the court. You know, politically and also judicially I will try to fight it back. Because my conscience is clear. I know I have not committed any such crime."

About the interim government's support for 'reforms' inside the political parties, Hasina said, "Our people should take decision who will lead them and who will be leader of the country. It's not the job of an interim government."

If an un-elected and unconstitutional government runs for a long period, then there would be no accountability, she said.

INTERVIEW WITH

THE BBC BANGLA SERVICE

Referring to the suspension of arrest warrant against her in a murder case, Hasina told the BBC radio that it is the reflection of people's desire. She alleged that the government is doing unethical activities as the same government is filing case against her and at the same time barring her from returning home.

By suspending arrest warrant, the government has already proved that the charges are false, Hasina said.

Terming the ban on her returning home 'a violation of human rights', Hasina asked the interim government to withdraw the ban.

Asked about her next plans, Hasina said, "I am communicating with different leaders in my country as well as in London. We will create world opinion against the present government in Bangladesh."

She replied negatively when asked about any communication with the government in Dhaka. Hasina declined to comment on any discussion with her party leaders.

"I want cooperation of my people for returning home and I firmly believe that people are aware of the matter," she said.

"I will face the situation legally and politically. I am not in fear of any consequence," Hasina said adding that she is ready for any sacrifice for people.

UNB reports: The government restriction on AL chief Sheikh Hasina's return to the country was raised during the meeting between Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett in London.

The bilateral meeting between the two was held at British Foreign and Commonwealth Office on April 19.

"We have sought clarification of the caretaker government's decision and the foreign secretary raised the issue in her meeting with the Bangladeshi foreign affairs adviser," a spokesman for the British High Commission in Dhaka said yesterday, a day after the former prime minister was barred from boarding a British Airways flight.

In reply to a question, the spokesman said, "Throughout the state of emergency we have consistently emphasised in our engagement with the caretaker government the need to balance concerns over stability and security with respect for individuals' rights and democratic processes."

Foreign Adviser Chowdhury, on his return from London, declined to make any comment to the media about the restriction on Hasina's homecoming.

Asked whether the government would respond to the explanation sought by the British High Commission regarding the press note that embargoed Hasina's return, a senior foreign ministry official said they have not received any written communication about the matter.

HASINA'S ARREST

WARRANT STALLED

A Dhaka court yesterday suspended the operation of the arrest warrants issued on Sunday against former prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and two others in connection with the Paltan killings on October 28 last year, reports our court correspondent.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza passed the order following a petition submitted by the investigation officer (IO) of the case seeking further investigation into the case and suspension of operation of the arrest warrants against Hasina and two others.

The court also directed the IO to probe the matter and fixed May 18 for submission of the probe report.

The same court on Sunday issued arrest warrants against Hasina, former home minister and AL leader Mohammad Nasim and AL activist Kiron alias Abdul Malek after accepting the charge sheet in connection with the Paltan killings.

They were shown absconding in the charge sheet in which Nasim was and still is in jail custody.

The IO had prayed to the court for the issuance of arrest warrants against the accused 'fugitives' and confiscating their properties.

After scrutinising the case docket and other relevant documents, Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza had passed the order on the IO's plea for issuance of arrest warrants against them.

However, the court did not pass any order on the IO's plea for confiscating their movable properties.

In yesterday's petition, Sub-inspector Enamul Haque of Detective Branch of police, also the IO of the case, mentioned that he had

earlier investigated the matter and found evidence against a number of people involved with the killings but he did not collect their correct names and addresses. So, he failed to include their names in the charge sheet, the IO added.

He said further investigation into the incident is required to collect the correct names and addresses of those involved with the killings.

Moreover, the operation of the arrest warrants issued earlier against Hasina, Nasim and Kiron should be postponed until the investigation completes, the IO added.

Putting off the operation of the arrest warrants against them, the court directed the IO to probe into the matter again.

On April 11, police pressed charges against Hasina, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatuya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu and 42 others for killing five Jamaat-e-Islami activists and injuring several others.

Of them, Roymohon Shil, Omar Faruq and Sumon are now in jail custody.

Forty others including Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Dr HBM Iqbal and Jahangir Kabir Nanak were earlier granted bail from the High Court (HC).

The IO dropped the names of Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed and 14 others from the charge sheet, as he did not find evidence indicating their involvement in the killings.

Prior to the caretaker government's taking over power on October 28, seven people were killed in a fierce clash between activists of AL-led 14-party alliance and Jamaat-e-Islami in Paltan area. A day later, Workers Party and Jamaat filed separate cases in connection with the same incident with Paltan Police Station.

CASE AGAINST NIZAMI The murder case filed against Jamaat Amir Matdur Rahman Nizami and nine others, in connection with the killing of a Workers Party activist on October 28 last year, was sent to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court for trial yesterday.

The IO of the case, AKM Idris Hossain, sub-inspector of the Detective Branch of Police, pressed charges against 10 leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir in connection with the killing of Workers Party activist Rasel Ahmed Khan.

The prosecution said on October 28 last year activists of Jamaat and its student wing Shibir gathered in front of the north gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque and launched an attack on the AL-led 14-party alliance activists when they were passing through the area.

The attack sparked a fierce street fight between the rival political activists. During the battle, Shibir activists were seen shooting from their firearms, the prosecution said.

Their rivals also reportedly launched a counter attack with oars and sticks.

2 top leaders

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Anisuzzaman, Fayez Ahmed, Ataus Samad, Hamida Hossain, Syed Shamsul Haque, Quaiyum Chowdhury, Anwara Syed Haque, Mamtazuddin Ahmed, and Ferdousi Majumdar.

They added, "Citizens want those guilty of looting state property and extreme corruption to be brought before the court through legal procedures, but they do not want extra-legal processes."

"We are urging the present caretaker government to reassess and analyse the measures it has already taken," they said.

"The government has to show foresight and acute judgment in every step they take with intentions to bring necessary changes and reforms while suspending the people's fundamental rights," the intellectuals said.

In parallel with political reforms, the intra-party reforms and democratic practice carry special importance for the future of the nation," they said, adding, "We hope necessary steps to this end will be taken from within the political parties."

"In this regard, any change brought about by pressures from above cannot bring any good results. Instead, the ethical and regulatory pressures from governmental reforms would be positive and fruitful in this context," they said, adding, "It is of special importance that the government take responsible and well thought out measures."

The intellectuals also stated, "Citizens support the current government's commitment to a proper and effective democratic process by taking charge when the nation was mired in a grave political crisis."

They said although the country returned to democracy in the early 1990s, a certain self-interested group turned governance into an arena where they could do anything they want, instead of expanding people's rights and power.

"Politicisation of every level of the administration and the dominance of black money turned the country's democratic process into a farce," they said.

The current caretaker government took charge at one stage of the people's protests, resistance and struggle against the administration's politicisation and black money's dominance.

"We want to see the success of this initiative and hope for the establishment of a strengthened democratic ideals and regulations," the statement said.

Salehi

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others -- Prof Mia Muhammad Mohiuddin, Zahangir, Salam, Nazmul and Azimuddin in the case. A magistrate court issued arrest warrant against him following the charge sheet.

On March 29, the HC bench of Mainul Islam Chowdhury rejected Salehi's anticipatory bail petition and asked him to surrender before the magistrate court.

Contacted over phone, Prof Taher's family members told that they fear that Salehi might get away without any punishment due to the flaws in investigation. They also said that the investigation so far had revealed that Salehi took away the revolver, used in murder, and some documents belonging to Prof Taher.

"His (Salehi) interrogation may reveal significant information on the killing," Taher's wife Sultana Ahmed said.

Investigation Officer (IO) of the case Achanul Kabir also agreed on the point when contacted over phone, but he noted that since the case is currently under trial, there is no scope for further interrogation.

"Still there is adequate strong evidence for proving the charges against Salehi," he said adding that some other important pieces of evidence are yet to be produced before court.

Apart from the judicial confessions of Zahangir, Salam and Nazmul, Salehi's activities since the murder amply prove that Mohiuddin hired Salehi for his political influence to carry out the murder, the IO said.

In addition, the police have gathered photographs and videos proving close ties of Salehi and Mohiuddin, he added.

A teacher of Geology and Mining Department, Prof Taher was killed on February 1, 2006. His body was recovered from a sewer at the back of his quarters on RU campus on February 3.

WC semifinal

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Oram, who has recovered from a heel injury, said the surface would be better suited to New Zealand than the one at Grenada, where they lost to Sri Lanka by six wickets during the Super Eight.

"The Jamaican pitch is going to have a bit more bounce and seam than we've experienced everywhere else in the West Indies, so I know a few of the guys at the top of the bowling order are keen to extract some sort of bounce," Oram said.

Sri Lankan all-rounder Farveez Maharoof has made a strong case for selection ahead of Dilhara Fernando for the match.

Fernando secured his spot in the eleven with impressive performances against India and England but suffered an ankle injury against Australia. Maharoof, who replaced him against Ireland, was adjudged man-of-the-match for his haul of four for 25.

"I will give 200 per cent in the match and I would back myself to perform," Maharoof told. "We have played really well so far. It will be a case of continuing to give it our best."

Upl Tharanga, the out-of-form opener, looks all set to retain his place in the line-up amid reports that former captain Marvan Atapattu could replace him. Tharanga has managed only 17 runs in the last three innings but has been assured of his place by Asantha de Mel, the chairman of Sri Lankan selectors.

"We must not forget that Tharanga scored two centuries against England last year and also scored two centuries in the Champions Trophy," de Mel said. "In this World Cup also he was the highest scorer with 65 against India."

Jeetan Patel, the New Zealand off-spinner, was not so optimistic about gaining a spot in the semifinal line-up in spite of taking two for 48 against Australia. "I've heard Jamaica is a dirty, green seamer and Barbados is hard and bouncy, so I'm not sure how much more action I'm going to see," Patel told the Dominion Post, a New Zealand newspaper.

"I wasn't sure of my place in the squad because I wasn't sure how the wickets here would play. But so far it has been very good."

Paltan killing case

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Court that granted them ad interim anticipatory bail.

A division bench, headed by Justice MA Matin, upon an application, passed the order and asked them to surrender to the lower court during this time.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed assisted by Advocate Jahangir Hossain Selim appeared for the petitioners.

Meanwhile, a metropolitan court on Sunday issued arrest warrants against AL chief Sheikh Hasina and two others in the case. However, the same court yesterday suspended operation of the arrest warrants until May 28, the date set for the next hearing of the case.

Mamun confesses

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construction business if he failed to meet their demand.

Earlier on March 28, Tarique was shown arrested in another case filed with Gulshan Police Station for extorting Tk 81 lakh from a businessman.

MAMUN CASES

Meanwhile, Tarique's close friend Mamun yesterday confessed his involvement in extortion of Tk 10.31 crore.

Khairul Bashar, managing director of Abdul Munem Ltd, filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station on April 9.

Dhanmondi police also brought Mamun on a two-day remand yesterday in connection with a case, also filed by Khairul Bashar with Dhanmondi Police Station on April 17, for extorting Tk 1.17 crore.

Heavily guarded by police, Mamun was taken to the chamber of Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah at around 2:00pm. The magistrate recorded his statement for around two hours.

Mamun told the magistrate that he along with six others extorted the amount on different dates between 2001 and 2006. The six others are Obaidullah Khandaker, Qamruzzaman, Mahbub, Manik, Hablu and Mota Tareq.

According to the plaintiff, Mamun used to visit his office with several goons each time.

Mamun demanded the money identifying himself as a friend of Tarique Rahman while his goons threatened him to stop his construction business if he failed to meet their demands, added the complainant.

Earlier on different dates,

ADP

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to around Tk 20,000, sources said, adding that this would be done not because of resource constraint but because of lack of implementation capacity of the ministries concerned.

Planning ministry sources said a number of 'unnecessary projects' would also be omitted from the ADP to lessen the burden on the budget.

The government would make cuts in the revenue budget while spending for law and order enforcement and the election might go up.

The FCC observed a healthy GDP growth and improvements in remittance, exports and foreign exchange reserve.

The meeting expressed concern over high inflation rate. It however noted that government measures have reined in high credit growth, which is partly responsible for pushing up inflation.

Between January 12 and April 17, government borrowing was brought down to Tk 4,300 crore. Government borrowing stood at more than Tk 6,000 crore before the present caretaker government took over on January 12.

Private sector growth fell 0.2 percentage point after the January 12 takeover.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, GDP growth in the current fiscal year is expected to be 6.53 percent, which would be 0.2 percentage point down from last year's 6.71 percent.

Sources said the FCC is happy with the expected 6.53 percent GDP growth despite the political turmoil over the past year.

KEPZ to get licence

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government \$20 royalty for each acre of the land. The KEPZ has purchased about 2,500 acres.

Afterwards, this decision was sent to the law ministry for vetting. The ministry did not clear it since it did not comply with the private EPZ law.

Sunday's decision will also be sent to the law ministry for vetting. Sources said they expect clearance within seven days.

"We hope licence will be issued this month, and the KEPZ authorities will be able to start inviting investors next month," said one source.

Meanwhile, the KEPZ authorities are concerned about Karnaphuli bridge. The present bridge is not suitable for heavy cargo vehicles, and construction of the third Karnaphuli bridge does not promise an early completion.

"The KEPZ investors will surely want to see a functional infrastructure, and consider lack of it as a disincentive," the source pointed out.

Another problem is a lack of fresh water supply in the KEPZ area, which is located close to Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (Kafco).

The Kafco uses eight deep tube wells and has been heavily using water for fertiliser production for the last one decade. This has reduced availability of underground water.

Water of the nearby Karnaphuli river is highly saline and it cannot be used for industries at the KEPZ, sources mentioned.

However, Koika, a Korean non-government organisation (NGO), along with the World Bank has already planned a project to develop fresh water resources at the KEPZ site.

The KEPZ, by its size and invest-

Mamun made confessional statements to the same magistrate in connection with four other extortion cases filed with Gulshan, Kafrul, Shahbagh and Dhanmondi police stations.

Mamun was arrested from his Banani DOHS residence on March 26. Police seized a Spain-made .22 bore pistol and eight bullets from his house.

Dhaka-Kolkata

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big cities of the next-door neighbours. The communications ministry has been asked to make the preparations by June this year, the sources said.

A high-powered team of the ministry of communications recently visited Darsana Rail Station in Kushtia and Bangladesh border points for facilitating the service. The proposed passenger train would enter Bangladesh territory through Darsana border point.

The team, led by Additional Secretary ATKM Ismail, examined the customs and immigration facilities at the border and would submit a report to the government on the findings soon.

"The main objective of my visit was to see how quickly we can provide the customs and immigration services to the passengers," Ismail told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the government would try to start the journey from Dhaka Cantonment Station and provide the custom and immigration facilities there.

The Bangladesh Railways had already established broad gauge rail lines up to the cantonment station, sources said.

"Hopefully, we would be able to complete the preparations by June this year," another high official of the ministry of communications said. However, the actual date of official launching of the service would be decided following further discussions between the two governments, he said.

The trains would have the facilities for passengers to travel in different classes. The price of the tickets would be fixed on the basis of class, sources said.

BNP leaders

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yesterday told reporters at his New DOHS, Mohakhali residence, "There is no scope to demolish the unity of the party."

Responding to a question, Hannan Shah said, "The party can take action against me if I have done anything wrong. I only spoke in the capacity as an adviser to the party chairperson, not as a party leader."

Hannan Shah said that BNP leaders and workers are united under the leadership of Khaleda Zia and that according to the latest message he had received, Khaleda Zia will not leave the country. "Of course Khaleda Zia will not leave the country... she is sick now.... the chairperson is like the mother of the party, so the people of the country and we don't want her to leave."

Meanwhile, BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman yesterday told the BBC's Bangla Service that Hannan Shah's statements had caused confusion in the party.

"BNP is a large political party and Khaleda Zia is our leader. There is no possibility of splitting the party," he said.

Mainul, Matin

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Chairperson Khaleda Zia or about the other political developments.

He, however, briefed them about a meeting on various development projects in the shipping sector.

Meanwhile, Law Adviser Mainul Hossain met a scrum of newspaper and TV reporters as he came out of a meeting at the information ministry.

"We are a non-political caretaker government and so I should say nothing about politics," he said when the newsmen wanted to know the latest about the probability of Khaleda going into exile and the arrest warrant against Hasina.

"I don't know," he replied curtly when asked if the government had requested the British Airways not to carry Hasina home.

As to whether Khaleda Zia would be produced before the court, the law adviser said, "The court will decide on the matter."

"The political situation is difficult and I do not have answers of all the questions," he observed when a journalist wanted to know how come the government seeks Interpol's help to get back crime suspects or convicts from abroad while on the other hand, bars another accused from returning to the country.

CA asks expats

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respective countries of residence."

He informed them that economic growth, development and poverty alleviation are the high-priority recipe of the caretaker government.

Dr Ahmed also suggested them to think about the export of non-traditional items from Bangladesh.

The BBCC leaders appreciated the chief adviser's leadership and his government's performance, saying that political stability is necessary for socioeconomic development.

They put forward some suggestions, including setting up catering institutes, introducing special economic zones and improving facilities at Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

They apprised the CA of single-country Expo-2007 in October 2007 in London to be organised by BBCC and sought the government's cooperation. They noted the Expo-2005 was successful.

The expatriate businessmen said the trade exposition will help promote trade relations between Bangladesh and Britain.

The CA assured of extending all possible support in holding Expo-2007 as he was impressed with the BBCC activities, according to the CA's Press Secretary, Syed Fahim Munaim.

"Bangladesh is changing rapidly and things are becoming better," the CATold the team.

About special economic zone, the CA said the government has already taken up a programme on it and he will ask the Board of Investment (BoI) for the follow-up action.

Regarding the setting up of catering institutes, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting, said he will discuss with DFID (UK's Department for International Development) for their cooperation in establishing the institutes.

Govt body

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reducing the duty on imported edible oil aiming to cool off its price hike.

"Prices of edible oil, rice and wheat have increased in the market during last few days for which we recommended that the government rationalise the duty structure on crude and refined edible oil," Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Commerce and Chairman of the Inter-ministerial Monitoring Committee on Prices of Essential Products Golam Mostakim said after a meeting at his office.

The current duty on imported crude edible oil is 22-23 percent and around 45 percent on refined edible oil. If the gap between the import duties on crude and refined edible oil was reduced, it could bring a positive impact on the price of edible oil in the market, Mostakim said.

The committee also recommended import of edible oil and baby food through Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

It also suggested reducing the prices of sugar, which is in stock at the TCB, and importing edible oil with the money earned from selling the sugar.

However, Mostakim said there were no positive changes in the prices of wheat and rice in the market despite the implementation of zero-duty on imports of these two products.

Sources said the committee concluded that climate change, increase of price of fuel, increase of production cost and high transportation costs are to be blamed for price spiral of essentials.

The committee will place the recommendations to the commerce adviser for approval within a few days.

Representatives of ministries concerned were also present during the meeting.

27 killed in Iraq suicide blasts

AP, Baghdad

Three suicide bombers launched attacks in different parts of Iraq on Monday, killing at least 27 people and wounding nearly 60 on Monday, police and politicians said.

A parked car bomb also exploded outside the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad, killing one civilian, and a drive-by shooting wounded two guards at Tunisia's Embassy in the capital, police said.

Monday's first suicide car bomb attack occurred near the northern city of Mosul at 10:10 am when a suicide attacker detonated his car in front of an office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Massoud Barzani, leader of the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq, an official with the group said. At least 10 people were killed and 20 wounded in the attack in Tal Uskuf, a town 15km north of Mosul, said Abdul-Ghani Ali, a KDP official.

Ghanim Hazim, 37, a shop owner in Tal Uskuf, said dozens of people rushed past his store to the site of the blast to help the wounded, who "were screaming and asking for help as they lay buried under big pieces of debris."

He said residents of the predominantly Christian town were in deep shock because it was the first terrorist attack in their tight-knit community since the Iraq war started.

"This attack shows that no place in Iraq is free from the terrorists and their evil deeds," Hazim said in an interview as firefighters and police began removing the dead and wounded.