



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

Plus 8-page Rising Stars



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVII NO. 100

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 26, 2007

COMMITTED
TO
People's Right to Know

www.thedailystar.net

BAISHAKH 13, 1414 BS

RABUJI SANI 8, 1428 HIJRI

24 PAGES PLUS RISING STARS PRICE: Tk 10.00

GOVT ISSUES PRESS NOTES

Ban on Hasina's return lifted; no bar on Khaleda

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In a dramatic reversal, the military-backed interim government yesterday withdrew the bar on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's return to the country and also said it never put any pressure on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for leaving the country.

The decision ends weeks of intense speculation and drama regarding the future of the chiefs of the two major political parties in the country, who the government reportedly wanted to send into exile as part of its political reforms.

The decision, welcomed by both political parties, was taken by the caretaker government after two days of emergency cabinet meetings chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed, following

mounting international and local demands for the rollback.

A home ministry press note last night said, "The government issued a press note as a special security measure and in the people's interest on April 18, 2007 in



light of recent comments and activities of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and her concerns for personal safety."

"It was clearly stated in the mentioned home ministry press note that the measure was tempo-

rary. But, in light of opinions expressed in the media and in different quarters on the matter, the government has decided to withdraw the measure," the new press note stated.

Hasina yesterday told a private television channel that she will be returning home as soon as possible.

In a separate home ministry press note on Khaleda, the government yesterday said, "It has come to the government's attention that a number of news mediums recently have been publishing speculative news and opinions regarding BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia going overseas and her freedom of movement."

"The government's clear statement in this regard is that the government has never pressured and

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