

Hasina urges int'l community to persuade CG for early polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, now in London, has urged the international community to persuade the military-backed caretaker government to hold free and fair elections in the country at the earliest.

"We want the international community to put pressure on the caretaker government to hold free and fair elections at the earliest," said the AL chief at a lecture on "Democracy and Human Rights in Bangladesh" at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the University of London Wednesday night Bangladesh time.

Speaking at the event, member of British Parliament Jeremy Corbyn told Hasina that Britain, being a major trading partner and

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Telltale evidence of corruption at PSC

SURANJITH DEABNATH

Evidence of gross irregularities in the 27th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations points to a syndicate of corrupt officials led by the top office bearers of the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Amid allegations of widespread corruption, the candidates' medical test that started on April 7 was declared postponed on April 18, 2007 while an investigation of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), a military intelligence agency, is going on.

The DGFI primarily found evidence of gross irregularities, corruption, and bribery centring the 27th BCS examinations and the caretaker government postponed

the medical test of the BCS on the basis of DGFI report, sources in DGFI said.

It is widely alleged that in exchange of huge amount of bribes, a section of unscrupulous PSC officials acted behind the success of most of the 3,567 candidates who passed the examinations.

Most of them were not selected on the basis of their merit, claimed several PSC sources while the PSC chairman and members termed the allegation 'absolutely false and baseless'.

Of over 1.43 lakh examinees at the preliminary test held on November 18, 2005, some 26,500 candidates took the written examinations held in March-April, 2006

and 16,342 candidates attended the viva voce held between September and December the same year.

A Daily Star investigation detected some irregularities in the 27th BCS examinations and found that a group of officials and employees are accused of receiving bribes from aspirant candidates on behalf of the PSC's top office bearers.

The result sheets of the preliminary, written and final tests of the 27th BCS examinations clearly show suspicious patterns, indicating manipulation of the results to favour certain candidates.

Besides, viva voce was grossly used to pick certain candidates

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A CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver takes a nap yesterday on Eskaton Garden Road as there is a long queue of three-wheelers waiting to have their meters reconfigured to the newly fixed fare.

PHOTO: STAR

Goalpara power plant shut down for 2 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The 110-MW unit of Goalpara Power Station in Khulna was shut down for overhauling yesterday, an order from the chairman of Power Development Board (PDB) said.

Sources say the servicing of the plant could take up to two months to complete.

The decision was made in order to make the plant completely fit for production and help meet the demands of 21 districts under West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited (WZPDCL), said chief engineer of Goalpara Power Station.

PDB Consultant Shamsul Alam arrived in Khulna on Wednesday evening to inspect the plant and its boilers and tubes.

Sources in the Goalpara Power Station said a team, which arrived from Ghorashal Power Station on Wednesday, is expected to start the

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Tiger found dead in Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A 12-year-old Royal Bengal Tiger apparently died of a heart attack on the bank of a pond at Harbaria camp under Chandpai range of the east wing of Sundarbans Forest Division Wednesday.

Forest guards found the tiger Wednesday evening and brought it to the Wildlife Insemination Centre at Karomjal the same day.

Veterinary Surgeon of Mongla upazila Shasanka Mandol carried out an autopsy of the tiger. The tiger suffered the heart attack due to the scorching heat, Shasanka said in the autopsy report.

Prayer Timing		
May 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-31	6-35
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

US opens talks with Syria on Iraq

Rice meets Syrian FM; US forces kill top Iraqi militant

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met Syria's foreign minister yesterday in the first high-level talks between the two countries in years, hours after the chief military spokesman in Iraq said Syria had moved to reduce "the flow of foreign fighters" across its border.

Meanwhile, US and Iraqi forces have killed the most senior insurgent leader in Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi minister said yesterday.

The Bush administration has shunned Syria, which it considers a state supporter of terrorism, and last month President Bush assailed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (news, bio, voting record) for making a trip to Damascus, saying it sent mixed messages to the

Syrian government. But the White House has been under pressure to talk with Syria and Iran, another U.S. opponent in the region.

Still, a substantive U.S.-Iran meeting appeared less certain. The Iraqi government is pressing for Rice and her Iranian counterpart to hold talks during the gathering, saying Washington's conflict with the government in Tehran is only fueling the instability in Iraq.

In Baghdad, US Maj. Gen. William Caldwell said Syria had tightened its borders to and reduced the number of foreign insurgents crossing into Iraq a chief demand of the United States.

"There has been some movement by the Syrians ... there has been a reduction in the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq" for more

than a month, Caldwell said.

Rice and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem met on the sidelines of Thursday's conference. Earlier, a senior State Department official said they would discuss "Iraqi security issues." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was still being arranged.

Both the United States and Iran had also spoken favorably of a possible meeting, but the chances for that remained unclear.

Rice and the Iranian foreign minister "exchanged pleasantries" over lunch, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said. "They said hello, that's about it," said State Department spokesman

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PHOTO: STAR

Locals of Devidas Lane in Lalbagh in the capital queue up at a mosque yesterday to collect water as they are suffering from an acute water crisis.



FROM LEFT... Former lawmaker Mufti Shahidul Islam, former state minister Amanullah Aman, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia Mosaddak Ali Falu, former state minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood inside a prison van on the High Court premises yesterday.

Chandrika stripped of perks by Lankan SC

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court yesterday stripped former president Chandrika Kumaratunga of her official staff and 36 government cars, saying that she was not entitled to extravagant privileges.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Sarath Silva held that it was also illegal for her to occupy a state bungalow refurbished at huge cost to the state.

Kumaratunga completed two terms as the all-powerful executive president in November 2005 and was succeeded by her prime minister Mahinda Rajapakse. The two are from the same party, but are seen as having a serious personality clash.

"The Supreme Court also ordered the former president to pay 100,000 rupees (925 dollars) to three individuals who filed the case challenging the state privileges

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Journalists being harassed taking advantage of emergency

Journo leaders allege

UNB, Dhaka

Leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) have alleged that a vested quarter within the government is harassing journalists and mass media taking advantage of the state of emergency and called for putting an end to this situation.

The leaders urged the government to immediately announce wage board award for the journalists, stop killing and repression of journalists and cancel all black laws that are being used to repress the journalist community.

The demands were put forward at a discussion jointly organised by Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) in observance of the World Press Freedom

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Bomb strikes Afghan army bus in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

A bomb struck a bus taking Afghan soldiers to work in the capital Kabul early yesterday, killing the driver and wounding 25 more people, police and the defence ministry said.

The bomb, which the Taliban said they planted, was hidden in a car parked at the side of the road and was remotely detonated as the bus went by, an army officer said.

"Twenty-five wounded were taken to hospital," defence ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi told AFP. "22 are members of the defence ministry. There are three civilians. One person has died."

The city's criminal investigation chief Alishah Paktiawal said earlier the dead person was the driver of the bus. "It was a roadside bomb targeting an ANA (Afghan National

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UK offers help in fighting terrorism

UNB, Dhaka

Britain wants to help enhance Bangladesh's capability of combating terrorism as both countries are working together to fight against the threat of global and internal terrorism.

"We want to learn from each other's experience in combating terrorism and how we continue the operational cooperation which has already started," Ms Marriot Leslie, defence director of British Foreign Office, told reporters after a meeting with Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday.

Asked what form of cooperation UK is willing to extend to Bangladesh in countering terrorism, Leslie said she will hold discussions with different ministries and institutions to assess the

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Ex-minister Mosharraf, Milon sued for extortion

Charge-framing against 3 ex-state ministers May 6

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed May 6 for framing charges of three graft cases against three detained former state ministers and two of their family members while elsewhere, three separate extortion cases were filed against former health minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain, former state minister for education ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon and five others.

The accused in the three graft cases are former state minister for planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, former state minister for civil aviation and tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin, former state minister for labour and employment Amanullah Aman, Nasir's son barrister Mir Mohammad Helal Uddin and

Aman's wife Sabera Aman.

Before setting the date for charge framing of the cases, the court accepted the charge sheets in which the accused had been charged with amassing huge wealth through corruption and abuse of power.

Judge Momin Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court directed the jail authorities to produce Alamgir, Aman, Nasir and his son barrister Helal before the court on the scheduled date. The court also asked Aman's wife Sabera Aman to appear before the court on that date.

On April 29, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against them in connection with the graft cases filed with different police stations in March this year.

The investigation officers (IO) of

the cases submitted the charge sheets to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka showing 12 people as prosecution witnesses for each of the cases.

The ACC filed the graft cases against the accused on March 6.

EXTORTION CASE AGAINST MOSHARRAF

A housewife from Bhaluka in Mymensingh yesterday filed a criminal case with a Dhaka court against former health minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain and five others for demanding Tk 2 lakh from her husband in June last year.

The five others are Mohsin alias 'Goru Chora' Mohsin, 35, Delwar Hossain alias Dilu, 45, Awal, 35, Julhas Hossain, 28, and Tapan, 40.

In her complaint, the complainant, Aleya Begum, mentioned that

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BB seeks all banking information of Moudud, Bashundhara chairman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central bank has asked the commercial banks to provide all banking information of former law minister Moudud Ahmed and Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) sought the information by Sunday in a verbal instruction to the banks on April 30.

The National Coordination Committee (NCC) on Combating Corruption and Crime has asked for the information through the central bank, sources said.

Earlier, the central bank directed the commercial banks to

submit information on the bank accounts of the two former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. The commercial banks have already met the central bank directive and the BB has sent the banking information to the NCC, BB sources said.

The commercial banks have so far reported that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina each have about Tk 3 crore in their personal bank accounts.

In addition, both Bangabandhu Memorial Trust and Ziaur Rahman Foundation have some money, but the exact amounts of these funds

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Ex-minister Mujahid sued for extortion

UNB, Sylhet

An extortion case was filed against Jamaat Secretary General and former minister Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid and five other leaders of the party with a court here yesterday.

M Abdullah, son of late Nur Uddin of Bajekhel village in Kanaighat upazila, filed the case against Mujahid, former MP Maulana Farid Uddin Ahmed of Kanaighat-Jakiganj constituency, Jamaat leaders Mainuddin and his brother Aziruddin, and Safar Uddin and his brother Moinuddin of the same upazila.

In his statement, the plaintiff alleged that the accused

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