

Hasina charges

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The trial court decided to continue the hearing as the prosecution did not produce some evidence and documents substantiating the charges brought against the accused.

The defence is scheduled to come up with their submission for further hearing after seeing the evidence. Though the prosecution completed their submission yesterday with the prayer to frame charge against the accused the court decided to continue the hearing.

Detained Hasina and another accused former health minister Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim were present during the court proceedings. Sheikh Rehana, the third accused whom the prosecution showed as "fugitive", is in London.

However, Barrister Azmalul Hossain had earlier appealed to the court to let him stand on Rehana's defence.

The court had rejected the prayer but decided yesterday to write down the decision following the lawyer's appeal for a certified copy of the decision so that he could go to the High Court (HC).

Azmalul also sought adjournment of the hearing until January 2 so that he might have time to settle the matter in the HC before hearing on charge framing against Rehana.

The court of Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque sat at 9:40am just five minutes after elegantly dressed Hasina came on the dock along with her cousin Selim.

Half an hour earlier, both the defence and the prosecution including AL acting president Zillur Rahman, a number of pro-AL lawyers, and Selim's family members entered the courtroom after phases of checking at several points.

As Zillur appeared, waiting defence lawyers brought a gown and helped him put it on as the 80-year-old veteran politician prepared to sit among Hasina's counsels.

When charges were being read out by Chief Public Prosecutor ABM Sharifuddin Khan Mukul, Hasina in her mixed-colour-handloom saree made scoffing comments finding those "baseless".

Wrapped in a coffee-coloured shawl, the former prime minister looked lively during the over two-hour-long hearing.

Although the court permitted both the accused to sit following a prayer from the defence, Hasina and Selim chose to stand during the hearing.

At times, the AL chief rested her head on her hands tinted with red henna and put on the wooden dock.

As Mukul was reading out the charge sheet Hasina and Selim were seen listening to it attentively, talking to each other, and sometimes consulting their lawyers and family members in a low voice.

"I don't know how to do business," was one of Hasina's remarks made several times in response to the charge that Selim had given her Tk 1 crore of the extorted money saying that "if the work is done, it would be a good business for us".

As Mukul mentioned the amount, Hasina in a satirical tone commented "only" with an insinuating smile flashing upon her face.

"The calculation does not even match the main figure," is another sharp comment by her when Mukul detailed how the amount was shared.

Mukul also read out excerpts from the judicial statement regarding realisation of the extortion money and its shares that Selim retracted in a petition before the same court on December 3.

Mukul also read out from the judicial statement given by Hafizuddin Khoka who had encashed and carried the extorted money on behalf of Selim.

The statement was enclosed in the supplementary charge sheet submitted just before the day the trial began.

The public prosecutor said according to the judicial statements of Selim and Khoka they deposited eight cheques of Tk 299,65,500 in bank accounts with the Standard Chartered Bank and the Southeast Bank.

It was found that Selim then opened an account with the Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd depositing Tk 15 lakh. The money was then withdrawn from the banks and deposited to the DBBL account, he added.

Mukul went on to say that Tk 1 crore of the money was given to Hasina, while Tk 50 lakh was kept in a fix deposit account in the name of Bangla Bani, a Bangla daily.

Selim opened another fix deposit account with Tk 15 lakh in his wife's name, he noted.

Mentioning the 24 pieces of evidence seized, the prosecutor pleaded the court to frame charges under sections 384, 385 and 34 of Criminal Procedure Code (CPC).

The charges the prosecution proposed are extorting money, intimidating an individual, threatening to injure an individual putting them in fear of something and conducting the crime in connivance with another through financial transaction.

After the prosecution completed their submission, the court asked the defence to proceed with their submission. But they declined to proceed saying they are yet to see some evidence of the case.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed said: "There's a provision to show seized items to the defence as well as to the

Hasina

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next? Everything has a limit," she was quoted by her counsel as saying.

About the extortion case she is facing, Hasina told her lawyers: "I know the result of this case is decided. It will be of no use making arguments and counter arguments in this case."

She said that cases are being filed for debarring her from contesting the election and eliminating her from politics.

Hasina also alleged that conspiracy has been on for long to baffle the survivors of the August 15 (1975) massacre.

"The scheme is designed in such a way if I myself is debarred from politics, no member of the Sheikh Mujib family could join active politics," she said, referring to making her younger sister Sheikh Rehana an accused in the extorted case.

The judge said: "Since there is an order from the apex court vacating the High Court stay order, there is no scope for me to adjourn the hearing. None will come forward to save me and I will not take the risk. It would be a contempt of court."

Just after the court began its proceedings, the defence sought directions from the court regarding security of the court. They said they, AL leaders, and family members of the accused face extensive checking while trying to enter the courtroom.

They termed the trial "a camera trial" and mentioned the inadequate sitting arrangements for people and the extensive security measures that did not even allow AL leader Motia Chowdhury to enter the court.

They criticised "unnecessary" deployment of police around the dock and demanded their withdrawal.

The defence said the law enforcers were treating them and the prosecution differently.

Ordering withdrawal of law enforcers from around the dock, the judge said they should reach an "amicable settlement".

Mentioning bomb blast incidents in courts and parliaments in different countries, the judge said: "I cannot give any order regarding security. I cannot ensure security. It is a matter of the government."

The court however pledged to ensure equal treatment of all lawyers and better sitting arrangements in the courtroom.

Quoting Hasina, Zillur said the case was going on to undermine the survivors of the August 15, 1975 attack on the Bangabandhu family.

He said the former premier has expressed her worries about a fair trial saying she thought the case was politically motivated.

Meanwhile, a large number of security personnel from different law enforcement agencies including police and Rapid Action Battalion were deployed on the roads adjacent to the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, with vehicles for quashing rioters on hand.

A considerable number of AL supporters thronged the area as well.

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NRB talents

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ceremony of the extravaganza with the army chief, the advisers to the caretaker government, senior state officials and civil society members.

The key objective of the conference organised by scholarsbangladesh.com. is to address the commission.

Law enforcement agencies arrested Hasina on July 16 and produced her before a magistrate's court, which sent her to the sub-jail.

The supplementary charge sheet was submitted on December 2.

IGP talks

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Noor Mohammad was addressing an opinion exchange and discussion with the civil society in Tangail jointly organised by Tangail Municipality, District Traders Association and Community Police at Shaheed Smriti Poura Udayan.

Emphasising formation of community policing, he said it is not possible to maintain law and order by only 136,000 strong police personnel as there is only one police official for 1,400 people.

He also warned members of the law enforcement agency saying everyone from the IGP to constable would have to face punishment if found guilty of neglecting duty.

He urged police personnel to establish faith and confidence among the general people and prove themselves as their friends.

In his speech, DG of Rab Hassan Mahmood Khandar said the elite force has recently declared war against terrorism, including trades and use of any illegal drugs.

"Our fight against terrorism, illegal drugs and drug traders will continue until the country is entirely free of these," he added.

DIG of Dhaka Range Mohammad Amir Uddin, Tangail Deputy Commissioner Akhter Ali Sarkar, and Tangail Superintendent of Police Abdul Mannan, among others, addressed the meet.

In addition, a career fair (jobs for NRBs offered by local institutions) and 800 units of community police in the district were also present.

War criminals

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voted to power, in case the caretaker government does not do so.

If everything goes according to the plan, the demand for putting war criminals on trial is likely to gain momentum early next year, said the trial seekers.

If the state of emergency is relaxed or lifted ahead of the next parliamentary polls, demonstrations like rallies and marches agitating for the demand will be arranged, said organisers and supporters of the movement.

"We want to see by March 26 a beginning of the process of putting the war criminals on trial. We will extend all out cooperation to the movement to realise the demand," Acting General Secretary of Awami League (AL) Syed Ashraful Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the next meeting of AL central working committee will discuss the logistics of intensifying the ongoing movement across the country. Senior leaders of the party will also be discussing with the sector commanders regarding shifting the agitation into a higher gear, he said.

In a bid to make the movement stronger, the sector commanders' forum will sit on December 29 with a number of organisations of freedom fighters to discuss the logistics of launching a countrywide campaign for putting the war criminals on trial.

The forum already initiated measures to establish its network at district and upazila levels to heighten the intensity of the movement, since the caretaker government still remains rigid on its stance of not initiating any process of putting the war criminals on trial.

Meanwhile, Awami League acting president Zillur Rahman, emerging from the court, told the media men that Hasina's movement inside the sub-jail has been restricted without assigning any reason. As a result, she is virtually in solitary confinement now, he alleged.

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ECHOING his Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said his party will actively participate in the movement.

Leaders of all pro-liberation war forces will gather at the grand rally to press them to chalk out a strategy for intensifying the movement and to press them to include the issue of putting war criminals on trial in their election manifesto.

Most of the pro-liberation forces have started boycotting state events where war criminals are for trying the war criminals. "We will of course meet the people's hopes and aspirations, if we are voted to power," he asserted.

Almost all of the political parties, who participated in the electoral reform talks with the EC between September and early December this year, strongly demanded that the EC should not allow anti-liberation forces including Jamaat-e-Islami to get registered as political parties with the commission, and it should bar war criminals from contesting in elections.

The political parties also refused to sit with Jamaat in a common meeting with the EC, terming Jamaat as an anti-liberation force which had worked against the birth of Bangladesh.

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