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Court orders trial of Hasina, Rehana, Selim

AL chief claims she was implicated in extortion case for not striking deal with govt, demands polls by April

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against former premier Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim in a Tk 2.99 crore extortion case.

It also decided that trial of the case filed by businessman Azam J Chowdhury would begin Thursday.

This is the first time charges have been framed against a former



prime minister.

Hasina, also president of Awami League (AL), however, protested her innocence and termed the case false and motivated.

Of the three, Hasina and former health minister Selim are detained while Rehana, who lives in London, was indicted in absentia.

Meeting her lawyers after the proceedings, Hasina demanded a national election by March-April.

Earlier, standing in the dock, she

said, "False cases were filed against me after I had refused to strike a deal with the government. Another reason was I never want a military dictator to assume power and become the country's president."

Addressing Judge Azizul Haq of Dhaka Metropolitan Session Judge's Court, she said she knows he is helpless as "he has to follow dictates from some special places".

"I know even if you move to

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AL asks govt to hold talks separately

Warns against inviting Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) called on the government yesterday to hold dialogue with political parties separately because they would back out if the administration sits together with all parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami.

"The Awami League will not go to any dialogue if the Jamaat is invited there. We cannot sit together with Jamaat," AL president member Tofail Ahmed told reporters at the party's acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence in the capital.

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Rice import bill soars 761pc, BoP in pressure

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Rice import expenditure increased by 761 percent in the first six months of the current fiscal compared to the expenditure in the same period of the last fiscal, creating a pressure on the Balance of Payment (BoP), says a Bangladesh Bank (BB) statistics.

According to the BB statistics \$310 million was spent for importing rice during July-December 2007 period of the current fiscal compared to the spending of \$36 million in the corresponding period of the last fiscal.

The amount of rice imported during the first six months of the

current fiscal also increased by 470 percent compared to the import during the same period of the last fiscal, according to the BB data.

Bangladesh imported 9.98 lakh tons of rice during the July-December period of the current fiscal compared to the 1.75 lakh tons of rice imported during the same period of the last fiscal.

Besides, importers opened letters of credit (LC) for importing another 16 lakh tons of rice spending \$538 million in the first six months of the current fiscal compared to the opening of LCs worth \$47.54 million to buy 2.32 lakh tons of rice during the corresponding period of the last fiscal.

The BB data also show wheat import expenditure rose to \$310 million in the first six months of the current fiscal marking a 57 percent rise from the spending for the purpose during the same period of the last fiscal.

LCs worth \$456 million were opened to import another 12.62 lakh tons of wheat in the first six months of the current fiscal, while during the corresponding period of the last fiscal 11.19 lakh tons of wheat had been imported with LCs of \$238 million.

An official of the central bank said the huge increase in import cost has a negative impact on the

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EC may not redraw constituencies, if all parties oppose

Says Sohul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) may refrain from redrawing the parliamentary constituencies if all political parties oppose the move, an election commissioner said yesterday.

"We will reconsider the plan to redraw the boundaries of the parliamentary constituencies if all political parties oppose it, although it's our constitutional duty to do it," Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told reporters in his office.

Since the announcement of the plan to redraw the boundaries of constituencies last week, major political parties including Awami League, BNP, and Jatiya Party have been saying the move might end up

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Students of Dhaka University stage a sit-in on a road near Doyel Chattar on the campus, demanding release of their arrested teachers and a student.

PHOTO: STAR

Faiz meets DU teachers in jail

Education adviser says teachers, students to be freed in few days

DU CORRESPONDENT

The government will release the teachers and students charged in two cases for breaching the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) 2007 upon completion of "legal process", said Prof SMA Faiz, vice chancellor (VC) of Dhaka University (DU).

In the meantime, Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman yesterday said detained teachers and students of DU will be released within the next few days.

The students of DU, however, issued a five-day ultimatum to the government yesterday to release the detained students and teachers. They also announced that they would launch tougher programmes

if their demands were not met.

Following a meeting with Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed and Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed, VC Faiz said at a news briefing at his office yesterday afternoon, "The government has decided to release the detainees of the cases. There is no hesitancy in the government in this regard. They will be freed as soon as the ongoing legal procedure is over."

The meeting was also attended by education adviser, foreign adviser, LGRD adviser, law adviser, principal secretary to the CA, press secretary to the CA and the chiefs of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and National Security Intelligence.

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Rice prices up again in wholesale market

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The price of different varieties of coarse rice continued to fall in the retail market while it witnessed a slight rise in the wholesale market in the capital yesterday.

The price of potato and onions has remained stable in the retail market for the last three days but it soared in the wholesale market.

Meanwhile, the joint forces yesterday held a meeting with the businessmen at BDR Headquarters and said they would start monitoring the market from January 18.

Expressing their resentment, the businessmen said an attempt to hold too much control over the market will not bring any good, rather the prices should be left on the markets.

IRRI, Gudi and Swarna were sold yesterday at Tk 28-30 per kilogram, which were Tk 29-30 the previous day in the retail market at Karwan

Bazar, Nababganj, and Mohammadpur Town Hall market.

The price of the same varieties of rice went up by Tk 15-30 a maund (37.32 kg) in the last two days in the wholesale market at Karwan Bazar, Badamtoli and Mohammadpur Krishi Market in the capital.

Guti rice was sold at Tk 1000-1020 a maund, Swarna at Tk 1010-1025 and IRRI at Tk 990-1000 per maund yesterday while those were Tk 980-990, Tk 990-1000 and Tk 980-985 respectively on Thursday and Friday.

Wholesalers said they sold Swarna to retailers at Tk 1230 per maund and Gudi and IRRI at Tk 1150 after the price of rice went up abnormally following India's announcement of not exporting rice to Bangladesh less than US\$ 500 per tonnes.

But later, when the previous day in the retail market at Karwan

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Purchase of 1.6 lakh tonnes of urea okayed

UNB, Dhaka

The advisers' committee on public purchase yesterday approved four procurement proposals including import of 160,000 tonnes of urea.

The committee, the highest cabinet body, decided to procure fertiliser immediately following growing demand from the farmers.

In its proposal, industries ministry sought to procure urea from Bangladesh-Japan joint venture KAFCO in Chittagong and Qatar.

Some 50,000 tonnes of urea will be imported from Qatar Fertiliser Company and Ruais Fertiliser Company at a cost of Tk 48.36 crore.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

ILLEGAL VOIP Tk 150cr fine slapped on Citycell

MD HASAN

Citycell, the country's oldest mobile phone operator, has been fined Tk 150 crore by the telecom regulator for its involvement in illegal VoIP or international call termination.

The company has already paid Tk 75 crore to the telecom watchdog - Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) -- and the rest of the amount will be paid within a short time in two instalments, BTRC sources said.

Citycell is the fourth mobile operator to be fined for their involvement in the VoIP scandal. Grameenphone, the country's largest operator was fined Tk 168.4 crore, Aktel Tk 145 crore and Banglalink Tk 125 crore. In total Tk 588.4 crore will be deposited with the government exchequer as compensation.

VoIP made it possible to terminate international calls illegally as only Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), the state owned body, had the right to do this.

FULL STORY STAR BUSINESS, PAGE 8

NOTICE TO KHALEDA SC hears Feb 13 ACC's plea for stay on HC order

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court has set February 13 for hearing of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) petition for staying operation of the High Court order that stalled the ACC notice asking detained former premier Khaleda Zia to submit her wealth statement.

The chamber judge of the SC yesterday passed the order when the counsel for the ACC moved the petition as it preferred leave to appeal against the High Court orders.

Earlier on November 25 last

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Unfit CNG cylinders pose huge threat

No govt initiative yet to check fitness of cylinders in vehicles

PORIMOL PALMA

Many CNG-run motor vehicles are believed to be fitted with cylinders that have a high risk of exploding as those were either not built for compressed natural gas (CNG) or their integrity was not timely verified.

There is no active measure as yet from the government to verify the fitness of the CNG cylinders, according to Society for Urban

Environmental Protection (SUEP), an NGO. It claimed 18 accidents related to CNG cylinders left at least 17 people dead since January 2007.

"Counterfeit CNG cylinders and cylinders that have not been verified for integrity every five years, as required, are dangerous," said SUEP General Secretary Akhtar Hossain Babu.

Unfortunately, in many cases in Bangladesh vehicle owners are not

awake to the periodic need to verify their cylinders and the risk of using sub-standard or counterfeit cylinders. Some drivers in connivance with automobile workshops are replacing original cylinders with sub-standard ones, the NGO said.

The CNG cylinders that have guarantees for 15 to 20 years have to be brought in every five years for a check up by Rupantorito Praktirik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL) or by

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Demo at RU for release of held teachers, students

RU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Rajshahi University (RU) yesterday continued their demonstration on the campus demanding the release of the 10 convicted students and an employee of the university.

They also demanded withdrawal of the case accusing the students and the employee of being involved in violent incidents on the RU campus on August 23.

Hundreds of general students attended their classes wearing black badges and brought out a

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