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HASINA CASE HC wants to check why govt filed case under EPR

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday called for the records to check as to what circumstances prompted the government to give approval under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) for trial of the extortion case against detained former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

A High Court Division bench comprising Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Shahidul Islam called for the documents before passing the order for adjournment of hearing on the rule challenging the legality of placing the case under EPR as the crime had been committed before promulgation of the emergency rules.

The court adjourned the hearing until Monday at government.

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HASINA'S WRIT PETITION ON CASE UNDER EPR HC verdict to impact other graft cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court judgment on former premier Sheikh Hasina's writ petition challenging the legality of bringing an extortion case against her under Emergency Power Rules (EPR) will determine the fate of other such cases under the EPR.

Law Adviser AF Hassan Ariff made this comment yesterday while talking about the future of cases filed for crimes committed before the promulgation of the Emergency Power Ordinance but being investigated under the EPR.

During his weekly briefing, the law adviser also said the government will form a Constitutional Commission and enact Right to Information Act. He added that the

government is pondering about forming a Truth Commission as well.

His statements came a day after six legal experts appointed as amicus curiae ("friend of the court", an adviser to the court on some matter of law and who is not a party to the case) in the hearing of the extortion case against Hasina opined that it would be a violation of the constitution if a pre-emergency crime is brought under the ambit of EPR.

"The High Court interpretation of laws is applicable to all cases. So, fate of other similar cases will be the same," Hassan Ariff, the former attorney general said.

He, however, declined to comment on the opinion of the amici curiae, saying that the matter is sub

judice.

On Monday, an HC bench appointed a panel of seven senior Supreme Court lawyers as amicus curiae to assist the court voluntarily on points of law during the ongoing hearing of the rule issued following a writ petition filed by Hasina that challenged bringing of the extortion case under EPR.

Only a crime committed during the state of emergency could be tried under EPR, six of them observed. The other declined to work as amicus curiae.

Asked if amendments are needed to law to continue trial of graft cases once emergency is lifted, the adviser said, "We'll have to see the impact first."

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Ekushey Book Fair begins today

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair 2008 begins today on Bangla Academy premises in the city, commemorating the historic Language Movement of February 1952.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed is expected to inaugurate the month-long festival at 3:30pm, academy Director General Syed Muhammad Shahed said.

"We hope the fair would be more organised, well-decorated and lively this year compared to those in the past with the participation of bookworms, writers, poets, publishing houses and all others concerned," Shahed said at a press conference at the academy yesterday.

He said the authorities have taken up a number of initiatives considering the visitors' convenience and introduced stringent rules for the participating publishing houses.

The venue of the country's largest book festival and outside will be decorated with banners,

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Plan to bar corrupt politicians from polls uncertain

ZAYADUL AHSAN and
SHAKHAWAT LITON

The caretaker government's plan to debar the detained "corrupt" political bigwigs from contesting the next parliamentary elections might not work if they are not tried under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

According to a provision of the EPR, any person, convicted of corruption by a trial court, will be disqualified from contesting any election until adjudication of their appeal against the verdict.

But, if the trials of these detained political leaders are done under the existing laws instead of

the EPR, the convicted persons will be able to contest polls until the Supreme Court (SC) gives the final order upholding the trial court's conviction, which usually takes a long time.

Soon after launching the crackdown on the corrupt political leaders, the government amended the EPR on February 13, inserting the provision to prevent them from contesting all kinds of polls.

But following the opinion of the amicus curiae, uncertainty now looms large over the fate of the cases filed against these political leaders, including former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina.

Appointed by the HC, which is disposing a writ petition challenging the government decision to bring Hasina's case under the EPR, the amicus curiae vehemently opposed the trial of Hasina under the EPR as the alleged offence was committed before the promulgation of the Emergency Power Ordinance.

Legal experts said if the SC declares bringing the extortion case against Hasina under the EPR illegal in line with the opinion of the amicus curiae and orders trial under the ordinary law, then all other similar cases will also have to be tried under the ordinary law.

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Tarique taken to hospital

4 VIPs sent back to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman was committed to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) prison cell yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, four VIP prisoners who were undergoing treatment at BSMMU were sent back to jail yesterday evening. They are pro-Khaleda BNP Secretary General Hannan Shah, Sigma Huda, wife of detained former minister Nazmul Huda, Khulna City Mayor Tayebur Rahman, and Joinal Abedin Faruque.

Detained former premier Khaleda Zia's elder son Tarique was admitted at the hospital on advice of a medical board.

On the other hand, the four bigwigs were taken back to jail custody as the doctors concerned discharged them.

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FROM LEFT... Khulna City Corporation Mayor Tayebur Rahman, former BNP lawmaker Joinal Abedin Faruque and BNP chairperson's adviser Hannan Shah being taken to jail in a prison van from BSMMU yesterday. Human rights activist Sigma Huda, inset, was also shifted to jail.

PHOTO: STAR

Donors propose \$4b plan to fight natural calamities

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Joint Damage Loss and Needs Assessment (JDLNA) Mission of 11 donors yesterday proposed to the government a \$ 4 billion programme to mitigate natural disasters like cyclone Sidr to be implemented in the next 15 years.

The 70-member mission led by World Bank (WB) estimated the preliminary loss in last November's cyclone Sidr at \$ 1.6 billion, which is three percent of the country's GDP. The loss in agriculture sector was estimated at \$ 440 million and transport sector at \$ 140 million.

The WB's South Asia Region Lead Water Resources Specialist Masood Ahmad led the donors' side, while Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Aminul Islam Bhuiyan led Bangladesh side at the meeting held at the ERD where the mission made the proposal.

The JDLNA Mission started the assessment on January 11 following the government's appeal for assistance for rehabilitation in the Sidr-affected south-west region of the country.

The mission visited the affected areas, talked to people on the damage caused by the November 15 cyclone, discussed with officials of different ministries and prepared a 400-page draft assessment report. The draft was presented to the government at yesterday's wrap up meeting.

The areas of work under the 15-year programme include risk identification and assessment, strengthening and enhancing emergency preparedness, national and community institutions' capacity building and mitigating risks arising out of natural calamities linked to climate changes.

The mission proposed \$ 1.51 billion during 2008 to 2012, \$ 1.39

billion during 2013 - 2017 and \$ 1.09 billion during 2018 - 2022 for risk identification, disaster preparedness and mitigation programme.

"The mission gave a primary indication of what could be done for protection of people in the disaster-prone areas of the country in the long run," the ERD secretary told The Daily Star.

At the meeting, the donors said \$ 1.34 billion would be required for recovery and rehabilitation programme in the cyclone-hit areas. Of this, \$ 270 million would be required for immediate recovery and \$ 1.07 billion for medium term recovery, sources said.

The government at a meeting in December last year informed the donors that it would need \$ 2.2 billion for rehabilitation programmes in the Sidr-affected areas.

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BB appoints observers for 3 pvt banks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank in a sudden move yesterday appointed observers for three banks—IFIC Bank, UCBL and AB Bank—to monitor their activities closely following management issues in the banks.

The three private sector commercial banks have been suffering ownership disputes during the last few years, according to Bangladesh Bank sources.

After the government launched its drive against corruption, a number of the major stakeholders of the three banks have either been put in jail or have been on the run.

The three banks remain under the purview of the central bank's "early warning system".

Sources said Mahfuzur Rahman of the Anti-money Laundering Department of Bangladesh Bank was appointed the observer for AB Bank while General Manager of Foreign Exchange Policy Department of Bangladesh Bank

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2005 SERIAL BLASTS 7 JMB men get life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Rajshahi court yesterday sentenced seven militants of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) to life imprisonment for carrying out bomb blasts in Chapainawabganj on August 17 in 2005.

Two journalists, however, incurred the wrath of the convicts who, on their way back to jail, swooped on the newsmen, damaging cameras. The militants reiterated that the press thwarted their plan.

Judge ATM Mesbaudoula at the speedy trial court also fined the 18 men Tk 10,000 each, defaulting on which will earn them additional one-year's jail term.

The sentenced are Shahidullah ruk Selim, Abdul Kasher Tufan,

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Gangs active again for silent extortion

Phone calls of top criminals start asking for money

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Organised criminals have started large-scale extortion again in different parts of the city through phone calls using the names of listed top criminals now on the run.

Threatened by the callers, a good number of people have already paid them the toll without informing the law enforcers. Moreover, some residents of the infested areas have opted to move elsewhere due to an increase in such crimes.

Residents of Sobhanbagh and Lalmatia in Mohammadpur, Mirpur, and Pallabi say operations by the phone gangs are infesting

their locality. No less than 10 people have received threatening phone calls in Sobhanbagh and Lalmatia lately, they add.

An official from Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Mirpur Zone, said the crime is on the increase. He however could not give any statistics. "We have arrested several people in this connection, but their association with the top criminals couldn't be proved."

Police and Rab officials say petty criminals and frauds are extorting money identifying them as listed top criminals like Subrata Bain, Khandaker Tanveer Islam Joy and Shahadat Hossain.

The law enforcers say they have

trapped a number of people in the act of collecting the extortion money. They appear to be mostly street urchins or heroin addicts lured to collecting the money by the frauds.

A police official says these so-called top criminals first demand a huge amount of money. In most of the cases they later settle at Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000 which suggests they are frauds.

However, criminals led by the three top listed criminals, especially Shahadat of Mirpur, also sometimes collect tolls from landlords and owners of under-construction buildings and

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Cable fault caused blackout at ZIA

Probe bodies find

RASHIDUL HASAN

Fault in one of the age-old underground high-voltage cables caused the two-hour blackout at Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Sunday, found two probe committees.

Following the power outage, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism formed two committees the same night to probe the incident that shut down all operations of the country's leading international airport.

Both the committees submitted their reports to the secretary of civil aviation and tourism ministry on Wednesday, within the stipulated timeframe.

"The supply line of Desco (Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd) tripped as earthing [grounding] was created at the water plant point of ZIA due to the fault of a high-voltage cable," probe committee sources at the CAAB told The Daily Star last night.

The probe committee of CAAB in its report recommended replacing the high-voltage electric cables and other electrical equipment including the panel board at ZIA power plant. It also urged the authorities to properly equip engineers and staff members who handle electrical problems at ZIA.

Sample of the cable that burned out would be sent for laboratory tests for further investigation, said

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PHOTO: STAR

A number of large trees in the park at Farmgate in Dhaka died due to unknown reasons. Several trees on the pavement across the street also died. The photo was taken yesterday.

HAKURGAON BORDER Bangladeshis shot dead by BSF

Q CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Security Force (BSF) of India shot dead three Bangladeshis cattle traders and injured five others on Ratnai border under Badangi upazila of Thakurgaon district yesterday morning, BDR officials said.

The dead are Md Ataur Rahman, 8, son of Hukum Uddin of Amanthan village, Md Shahidul Hossain, 20, son of Rabiul Islam of Ratnai village, and Md Khurruzzaman, 27, son of Moresh Uddin of Ratnai village under the upazila.

Identity of the injured cattle traders could not be known as the time of this report at 7:00pm yesterday.

POWER ABUSE Ex-forest boss Munshi Anwar gets 3 yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday sentenced detained former chief forest conservator Munshi Anwarul Islam to three years' imprisonment for making illegal appointments by abusing power.

The third special court, set up at MP hostel of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, also fined him Tk 50,000 in default of which he has to suffer another month in jail.

Judge Shahed Noor Uddin pronounced the verdict in presence of Anwarul.

While serving as the chief forest conservator, Anwarul appointed 79 officials in the forest department from January 29, 2004 to August 31, 2005 taking bribe from them.

He appointed them without

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