

Anti-graft drive, reform to go on if AL voted to power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained former prime minister and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday said if her party forms the government, reforms and the ongoing drive against corruption would continue uninterrupted as per the law.

Acting Awami League President Zillur Rahman quoting Hasina told this to journalists on the Jatya Sangsad Bhaban premises after having an hour-long meeting with her at the sub-jail.

A special court gave 10 defence lawyers the permission to meet Hasina at the sub jail. The same court had fixed Thursday for the hearing on charge framing in the Tk 3-crore barge-mount graft case filed against her.

"If Awami League assumes power, the drive against corruption will continue as per the law while reforms will go on and remain uninterrupted," Zillur, also Hasina's lawyer, quoted Hasina as saying.

Hasina also said if Awami

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EC to talk atmosphere for city polls with CA

Lifting or relaxing emergency to feature high on today's talk

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) is scheduled to meet Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed today to discuss creation of an environment conducive to holding the due polls to five city corporations in April, under the emergency regime.

Over the last few months the chief election commissioner (CEC) has been saying that the state of emergency either has to be lifted or relaxed to hold credible elections through allowing electoral candidates to hold election campaigns.

In the electoral roadmap announced on July 15 last year, the EC had promised to begin holding the due polls to different local government bodies in January this year, but by the end of the year the commission changed the promise by saying it will hold the polls to the five city corporations in April instead.

CEC ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday talked to the chief adviser over the phone and sought an appointment to meet him. The chief adviser gave the commission an afternoon appointment to meet him in his office.

The full panel of the EC including two other election commissioners Muhammed Sohul Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain will also sit in a meeting this morning to discuss holding the polls to the city corporations of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal, and also to discuss its draft protocol for appointing election commissioners, sources said.

Asked whether the EC will discuss holding of polls to city corporations, CEC Huda said in fact there is no fixed agenda for the meeting where everything might be discussed.

"We will inform the chief adviser about the progress in the last one year of the preparations for holding

the parliamentary election," Huda, who was appointed as the CEC on February 4 last year, told The Daily Star last evening.

He said they will meet the president and the chief adviser from time to time to apprise them of the progress of EC's work.

"We will also apprise the chief adviser about the difficulties we are facing in carrying out our duties," Huda said.

Replying to a query, the CEC said they might also discuss with the chief adviser their proposals drafted for setting up some criteria for appointing election commissioners.

Besides, the EC will discuss the draft ordinance which was recently approved by the cabinet to free the EC Secretariat from the control of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Tenure of three city corporations of Dhaka, Rajshahi and

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NIKO GRAFT CASE Top govt officials quizzed

ACC to question Khaleda in March

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) officials yesterday questioned four former bureaucrats in connection with the Niko graft case filed against detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia and four others.

Several days ago ACC Assistant Director Shahidur Rahman, investigation officer of the case, asked the bureaucrats to appear at the ACC headquarters in order to have their statements regarding the case.

Director Finance of Petrobangla CM Yusuf Hossain, former joint secretary of the energy ministry, is among the bureaucrats who were questioned. The other three were former high-ranking officials of the finance ministry and Petrobangla. Names of the three could not be known.

ACC sources said officials who were involved with the process of the Niko deal would be questioned in turn.

Khaleda Zia, prime accused in

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Graft makes former Titas staff filthy rich

Tk 4,000 salaried man amassed Tk 2,100cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The story of former Titas Gas sales assistant Abdul Kader Mollah would probably beat all incidents so far known about amassing wealth through illegal means. Believe it or not, as an employee drawing only Tk 4,000 in salary when at career's peak, Mollah accumulated wealth worth over Tk 2,100 crore.

He has 15 industries, 13 flats, 29 vehicles, a five-storey building, a one-storey house, a farmhouse and 45 acres of land and a balance of Tk 18.53 crore.

The startling story was unfolded as a special taskforce of National Coordination Committee (NCC) against Corruption and Serious Crimes started digging into institutional crimes at Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Co Ltd recently.

People have heard about meter readers turning millionaires, but Mollah's story is another testimony



Abdul Kader Mollah

to serious corrupt practices at government institutions, especially Titas Gas, Wasa, Rajuk, BTB and PDB.

Recent newspaper reports said another 130 officials and employees of Titas Gas are ready to return wealth worth over Tk 400 crore.

In his wealth statement, Mollah, whose name is on the list of corrup-

tion suspects, told the NCC taskforce of having wealth worth Tk 208 crore. But according to the taskforce, it would not be less than Tk 2,100 crore.

Kader Mollah even boasts about his business acumen: "Do you think I have stolen this money? This money comes from my business," he told reporters.

He claimed that he owns only five industries as "only the running industries should be counted".

The taskforce will send Mollah's wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Kader Mollah joined Titas Gas as an ordinary employee in 1985 and retired voluntarily after 12 years as a sales assistant. During his service at Titas, he developed good relationship with a BNP-backed CBA (collective bargaining agent) leader and ended up as a close aide to him.

Although Mollah was a sales assistant, his colleagues said he

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GAS LINE REPAIR Low pressure in CNG stations, household stoves

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Suspension of gas supply from Saturday midnight hampered the city life, mostly in the southern parts, with low pressure of gas in the household stoves and CNG refuelling stations.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited suspended the supply to a major part of the metropolis for 48 hours for repairing the faulty main gas-transmission line. Repair of the line began at 7:30am yesterday at Daudkandi in Comilla.

Since early morning, city dwellers found the gas pressure was zero in some places or so low that they could not cook during the whole day, while many of the CNG (compressed natural gas) refuelling stations were forced to shut down.

Regular commuters, specially the office goers, faced trouble in finding vehicles while many passengers alleged that the drivers of CNG-run three-wheelers charged high fares showing long wait in refuelling stations as cause.

Meanwhile, panic gripped the housewives on Saturday evening as they frantically made arrangements to cook the next two days' meals.

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Repair work is going on at the gas pipeline at Daudkandi in Comilla yesterday. The work caused suspension of gas supply to some places in the capital.

GRAFT CASE AGAINST HASINA Charge-framing hearing deferred to Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three days into the beginning of detained former premier Sheikh Hasina's trial in an extortion case, she was produced before a special court yesterday for arraignment in connection with a Tk 3 crore graft case, but the court rescheduled the hearing for Thursday.

The hearing was rescheduled after the defence had petitioned for more time to examine the case documents.

Awami League (AL) President Hasina is facing four cases on different charges, which were filed after the present military backed caretaker government had assumed power and embarked on an anti-graft drive targeting high profile graft suspects.

The prosecution in their introductory submission provided the court with a summary of the case filed by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) in connection with graft in setting up a barge-

mount 100MW power plant in Khulna allegedly depriving the lowest bidder.

Chief Public Prosecutor (CPP) ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul in his submission mentioned that Hasina awarded the contract of setting up the power plant to Khulna Power Company Ltd (KPLC) in exchange for a bribe of Tk 3 crore paid in eight pay orders.

While the CPP was delivering his introductory submission, the defence petitioned the court for more time on grounds of not receiving the case documents yet, examination of which they claimed are necessary to be able to properly defend their client at the arraignment hearing.

The prosecution opposed the defence's petition that sought a week's adjournment of the hearing, saying that the law does not permit adjournment of a hearing for more than three days.

Mentioning that there is a time

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Saifuddin Manik passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, a liberation war veteran and one of the doyens of the country's politics, passed away at a city hospital yesterday. He was 69.

The Gono Forum general secretary, who had been fighting lung cancer for the last one and a half years, breathed his last at 10.50am at Comfort Hospital where he was admitted on January 24.

He left behind wife Dr Faozia Muslem, daughters Joya and Geeta to mourn his death.

Manik was former president

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PHOTO: STAR

A man rakes through dead crows and other birds behind Dewanhaat CSD godown, a government warehouse, in Chittagong. Authorities suspect bird flu as the reason behind their sudden death.

BNP UNIFICATION BID FALTERS Delwar doubts claim of Khaleda's unity order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The unification process of BNP apparently came to a halt as Delwar, the Khaleda-appointed secretary general of the party, yesterday ruled out the message conveyed by Khaleda's lawyer.

Khandaker Delwar Hossain in a press briefing at his Nam flat said the party chairperson did not convey any such message to him through her lawyer.

On Friday, Khaleda's lawyer Mahbub Uddin Khokon, after visiting BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia at sub jail, told reporters, "She has asked to unite the party and urged the nationalist forces to

unite for the sake of the party and the country."

Meanwhile, most members of BNP standing committee decided to inform the court of their opinion regarding the party leadership before the hearing of the writ petition Delwar had filed against the decision of the Election Commission to invite the Saifur-led faction for electoral dialogue, said party insiders.

Legal wing of the pro-Khaleda faction will prepare statements on behalf of the standing committee members, sources said.

Standing committee members RA Goni and M Shamsul Islam -- who were present in the Oct 29

meeting of the standing committee held at Saifur Rahman's residence -- yesterday discussed the matter with Delwar, said party leaders.

At the press briefing, Delwar termed the lawyer's comment to the media 'intentional'. "I did not get any such message. I don't even know anything about it... I just saw the news in newspaper," Delwar said.

"I have no objection against the unification of the party. But since she [Khaleda] did not assign me [with the task], ...I cannot take any decision," he said.

"I don't know if political discussion is possible inside jail," Delwar

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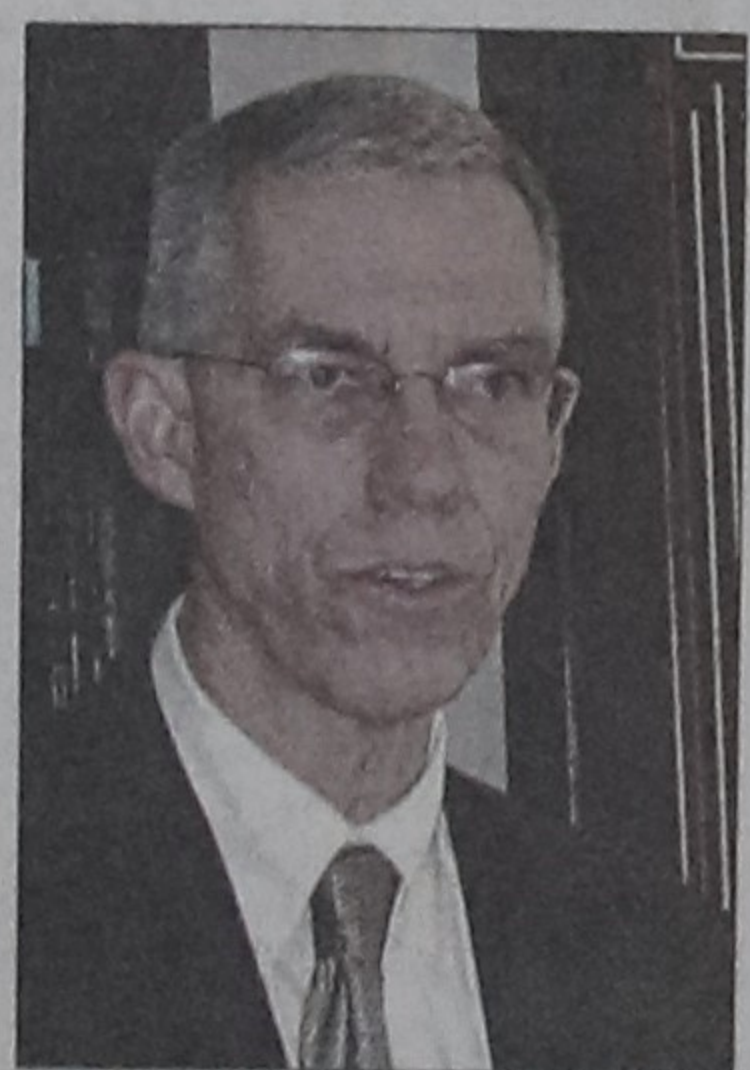
Govt mulling gas import from Myanmar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief adviser's Special Assistant Dr M Tamim yesterday said the government is considering importing gas from Myanmar even if it might require sharing fertiliser with that country.

"We'll either have to find new gas fields or import gas to solve the crisis in the long run," he said talking to reporters at the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

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Donald Camp

US to welcome lifting of emergency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

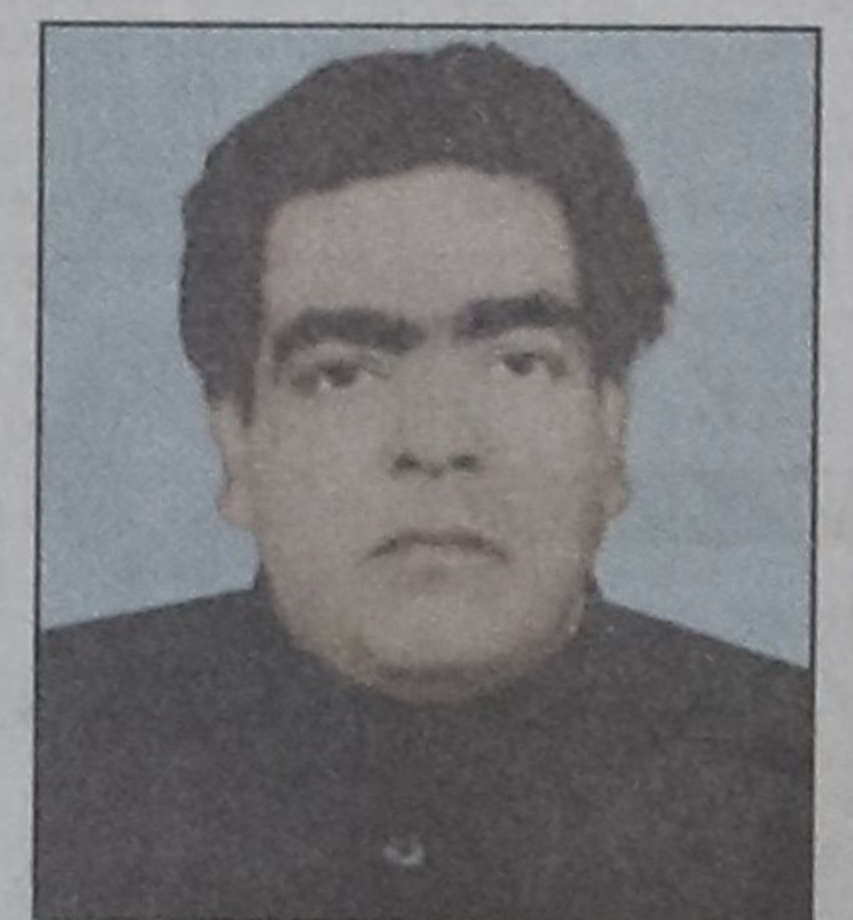
Visiting Senior US official Donald Camp yesterday said he would welcome withdrawal of the ban on indoor politics outside Dhaka and reiterated US backing for this caretaker government.

He also said the US has certain concerns about the situation in Bangladesh but refused to share them with reporters, saying he would express the concerns directly to the government.

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30th Death Anniversary

(Abul Company) The founder of Abul Khair Group noted industrialist and social worker
Late Janab ABUL KHAIR



Death: 4th February, 1978

In accordance with the will of almighty Allah the beneficent, you left this mundane world, leaving us and many of your relations overwhelmed by grief. In our everyday life your bright ideals serve as beacon. You are immortal in your death. We pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of your departed soul.

May Allah the beneficent bless you with the eternal bliss of paradise. Ameen.

Your loving
Son, Daughters and Relatives.