

CONVICTS UNDER EPR

Appeal courts asked not to grant bail

SC upholds ACC appeal against HC bail to Sigma, Helaluddin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday ruled that appellate courts, also including High Court, do not have the jurisdiction to grant bail to those convicted by special graft courts under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

Headed by Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin, the seven-member full bench of the Appellate Division of the SC delivered the significant judgment following appeals of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) against HC's bail order to corruption convicts Sigma Huda and Helaluddin.

Upholding the ACC appeal, the SC said when an appeal against a special court's verdict in a corruption case under the EPR is referred

to the appellate court, no bail can be granted to the appellant until disposal of the appeal.

The SC judgment also said the appellate court may grant bail to the appellant in cases of short sentence—if the appellant is ill and if the appeal could not be heard in the stipulated 90 days for no fault of the appellant.

But the illness will have to be certified by a medical report of a duly constituted medical board, the court mentioned categorically.

As a result of yesterday's SC judgment, the HC orders granting bail to Sigma and Helal were cancelled. ACC lawyer Advocate Anisul Huq told The Daily Star after receiving the verdict.

On December 13 last year, an HC division bench comprising Justice M Mozammel Hossain and

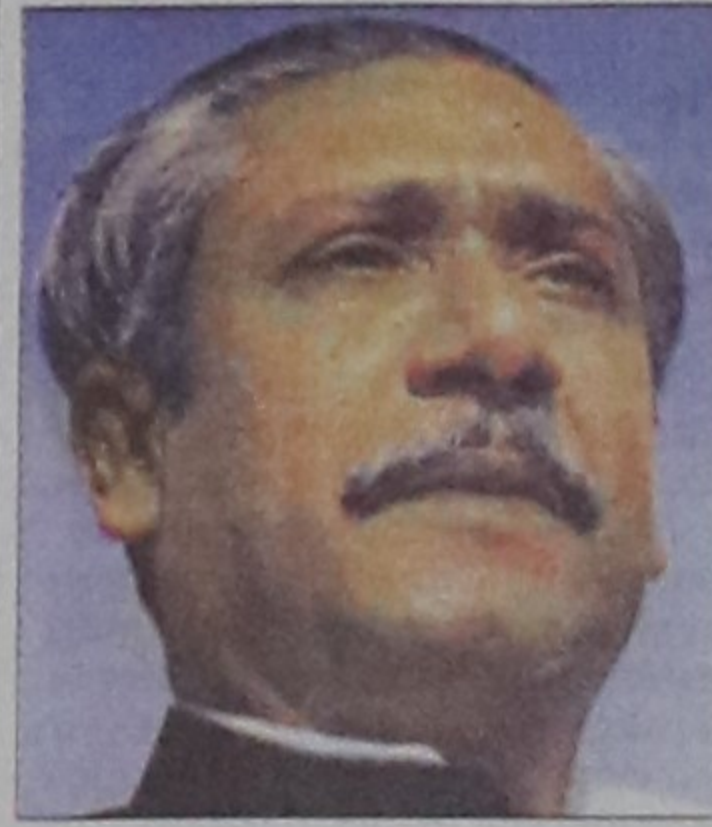
Justice Syed AB Mahmudul Huq granted bail to convicts Sigma Huda and Mir Helaluddin following separate petitions.

It was the first time that the HC granted bail to convicts tried and punished by a special court under the EPR.

On August 27 last year, a special court sentenced Sigma Huda, wife of former BNP minister Nazmul Huda, to three years' simple imprisonment and her husband to seven years' rigorous imprisonment.

Helal had been jailed on July 4 for three years for aiding and abetting his father, former state minister Mir Nasiruddin, in amassing property illegally.

According to some provisions of



Historic 7th March today

UNB, Dhaka

Today is the historic 7th March, a prelude to the nation's final struggle for independence fought and earned in 1971.

This day in 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a clarion call for non-cooperation movement and asked the nation to prepare for the war of independence from the exploitative Pakistani regime.

"The struggle this time is for freedom, the struggle this time is for independence, Joy Bangla," Bangabandhu declared from a mammoth rally at the historic

EC unaware of upazila elections in May

LGRD adviser blames media for misquoting him about polls fixture

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said he does not know anything about the plans for upazila elections in May as announced only a day before by the LGRD adviser.

"I know nothing about it. You better ask the one who made the announcement," an apparently irritated Huda told reporters after a meeting of the Election Commission (EC).

Earlier on Wednesday, LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said the government has plans for elections to 100 upazila parishes in May, reported different national dailies and private television channels.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, he however claimed he did not mention any specific timeframe. "I said polls to city corporations and seven municipalities would be held between April and May while upazila elections within December," Iqbal said

maintaining, "I was misquoted in the media."

Asked for comments about the EC's knowing nothing of upazila elections, the adviser said the government still has jurisdiction to speak about upazila polls.

"The authority to set polls schedule would begin to lie with the commission only after the existing upazila parishad act is amended," he observed.

About the caretaker government's decision in favour of the EC regaining the power to announce schedules for upazila elections, he said the advisory council has decided so in principle, but has yet to finalise it.

Meeting the EC on Monday, Iqbal suggested that the commission start holding upazila elections between April and May, but the EC said it would stick to its electoral roadmap.

Coming out of the meeting, the adviser in charge of matters relating to the local government bodies,

told reporters that the timetable for the upazila elections would be set by the EC.

According to the roadmap announced on July 15 last year, upazila elections should be held between November and December.

But the LGRD adviser's sudden announcement Wednesday has annoyed the EC, now busy preparing for polls to four city corporations and seven municipalities, as well as finalising the draft of electoral reform proposals, said sources at the EC Secretariat.

It reminded many EC Secretariat officials of the way things used to be before upazila elections during the previous governments.

Asked about the LGRD adviser's announcement, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohel Hussain said, "Let them hold the elections."

Another commissioner, Brig

Govt preparing for dialogue with parties

Says chief adviser

UNB, Barisal

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said his government is making preparations to hold dialogue with political parties in due time.

"The government will start talks with the political parties after their ongoing dialogue with the Election Commission," he said replying to a question about the dialogue at a

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HC not right forum to settle political party's internal dispute

Says Dr Kamal

UNB, Dhaka

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, defending the Election Commission against detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's legal fight, yesterday said any internal

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Hasina's personal docs check her for 3hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday suggested that her personal physicians form a medical board to carry out a complete medical checkup on her and place their recommendations to the government.

Two of her personal physicians—dermatologist Prof MU Kabir Chowdhury and medicine specialist Dr ABM Abdullah—yesterday examined her for about three hours at the sub-jail on the Jatya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

They told the ailing former prime minister that she should get admitted to a hospital as early as possible so they could examine her

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Mistrust keeps unification of BNP at bay

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Deep mistrust among the leaders of the two BNP factions is working beneath the process for unifying the party while a group of pro-Khaleda leaders claimed to have reached a consensus on some crucial issues.

Party insiders said leaders loyal to Chairperson Khaleda Zia are almost divided over the unification process as most senior leaders of the faction do not know anything about the procedure being conducted by chairperson's adviser Hannan Shah.

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A syndicate hoists illegal power outlets on the pavement of Bangabandhu Avenue at Gulistan in the capital and sells power to street vendors. The criminals are making profit by stealing power in this way and causing a huge financial loss to Desa.

Khaleda denies Niko graft charges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained former premier and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday told investigators that she personally did not violate any rules of business as her government signed a gas deal with Canadian exploration company Niko.

Denying any personal involvement in the process of awarding the contract for gas exploration to Niko, Khaleda also told the investigation team that she even did not sign on the final agreement between her government and the Canadian company.

Khaleda made the comments

when a four-member task force team quizzed her at a sub-jail on the national parliament building premises in connection with the Niko graft case filed against her and four others on December 9 of last year.

Khaleda's counsels, who had been present during the quizzing, told journalists that the former premier informed the investigators that she had done everything in accordance with the rules of business of the government and had not personally signed the final agreement with Niko.

The counsels also mentioned

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ACC to probe graft reports at missions abroad

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has decided to begin enquiries into allegations of corruption, irregularities and abuse of power against officials working at Bangladesh missions abroad.

Initially, the ACC will probe allegations of corruption, misuse of government money and abuse of power against officials at the Bangladesh Embassy in Abu Dhabi, including the ambassador.

"In the primary enquiry,

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BURIGANGA CAPSIZE PROBE REPORT

Survey token issued to totally unfit launch

67-person capacity vessels had 150 seats

SHARIFUL ISLAM

A probe committee formed to investigate the launch disaster of February 28 in the Buriganga found that the launch had capacity to carry only 67 people but had seats for 150.

The five-member probe committee in its report submitted to the government yesterday also said

they found huge irregularities on the part of the surveyor as the official gave survey certificate to the launch MV Shourav-1 without surveying it.

"The irregularities are so horrifying... a surveyor issued the survey token for the launch from Barisal when it was plying on Dhaka-Taltola (Munshiganj) route," said one of the members of

the probe committee seeking anonymity. As per rule, a surveyor must visit and survey a launch before issuing a survey token.

"Even though the launch had not fulfilled the minimum fitness requirements, the surveyor gave it the survey token, meaning the vessel is fit," the member said.

The launch was illegally plying

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US terms Huji as foreign terrorist outfit

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

The US state department on Wednesday formally labelled Harakat ul-Jihad-i-Islami-Bangladesh (Huji-B) as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) and as a specially designated global terrorist (SDGT), to allow the US government to target the Islamist terrorist group's finances and operations.

The group, notorious for carrying out armed attacks on unsuspecting targets, is more commonly known as Harkatul Jihad Al Islami in Bangladesh.

Huji, as a global terrorist outfit, was previously put on the list of 'Other Terrorist Organisations' in 2003 by the US, but the latest move provides the government of that country with the legal basis for actions against the group.

The designation also signals to Bangladesh, the US government's 'heightened concerns' about Huji-B, and bumps up the outfit's terrorist status by putting it among an elite group of 44 FTOs formally identified by that government.

The move came as a result of the US state department's counter terrorism wing's view that Huji-B has 'engaged in planning and preparations for possible future acts of terrorism' and 'retains the capability and intent to carry out such acts' against US targets.

"The leader of Huji-B signed the February 1998 fatwa sponsored by Osama bin Ladin [sic] that declared American civilians to be legitimate targets for attack. Since then, Huji-B has been implicated in a number of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh and abroad," stated a US news release in Washington.

Signed by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the Executive Order 13224, criminalises providing material support to Huji-B by US citizens or people living under US jurisdictions, and freezes all Huji-B property and interests in the US and in areas under US jurisdiction.

The designation also enables the US to deny visas to Huji-B representatives, and requires US financial institutions to freeze assets held by Huji-B.

The Bangladesh home ministry quickly responded to the announcement, with a senior home ministry official saying, any covert or overt activity by any terrorist organisation will be dealt with an iron fist.

Groups are usually labelled 'specially designated global terrorists' as part of the US government's three-year old campaign to starve out terrorists of funds.

So far, more than 390 groups and individuals have been designated supporters or financiers of terrorism under the programme—meaning they are subject to seizure of assets and are prevented from doing business with anyone without government permission.

Huji-B emerged with an open declaration of Jihad at a news conference in early 1992. But the then BNP government did not pay any attention to the outfit's dramatic appearance.

The group had been nourished almost unchallenged for years until now detained former premier Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League

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Tk 7cr more gone with 2 other Natore NGOs

Registration of 2 NGOs cancelled

ROVING CORRESPONDENT, Natore

The Social Welfare Directorate yesterday cancelled registration of two fraud NGOs in Natore while officials of two more NGOs disappeared with around Tk 7 crore in Natore and Rajshahi.

Registrations of Freedom Unnayan Sangstha and Probbati Grameen Unnayan Sangstha that disappeared on February 28 and March 4 with huge amount of money were cancelled.

Bank authorities said they have been asked by the district administration to freeze accounts, if any, of the two NGOs.

Victims of these NGOs held a protest meeting in Nasratpur from where they announced to besiege Natore Deputy Commissioner's Office on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Jibon Dhara, an unregistered NGO in Dhamongram village in Naldanga, and Doel Bahumukhi Atma-Karmasangsthan Sangstha in Durgapur, Rajshahi have disappeared.

Jibon Dhara staffs Shahidul

Islam and Moazzem Hossain told reporters the NGO had collected about Tk 4 crore from 6,000 members through 104 branches in Natore, Rajshahi and other districts.

"The NGO men were distributing money among its members of Dhamongram and announced refunding its members from other villages today [Thursday]. But we found its office shut and no-one was available," said Azad of Dhamongram in Durgapur, Rajshahi.

Doel men also disappeared in a similar fashion with Tk 3 crore collected from 104 branches. Officials of many other NGOs also went into hiding as angry members began to hold officials.

Victims of Sonar Bangla held its staff Rois in Babur Pukur in Natore and took him to Bhabni in Naldanga. They also picked up Nurul Islam, brother of NGO staff Walimuddin, and another staff Zamal in Bhabni and beat them up.

Leaflets were circulated in Naldanga villages on behalf of the victims of Freedom and Probbati

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Due to high salinity in water in the south-western region of the country, people use large vessels to store rainwater for drinking and cooking. The photo was taken from Mongla in Bagerhat.

PHOTO: STAR