

Khaleda denies

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that Khaleda at one stage of questioning questioned the investigators back regarding the legitimacy of the case against her, since she personally had not signed the deal.

Sources in the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) said regarding the allegation against Khaleda that she had ordered former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain to okay the agreement with Niko, the detained former premier said she had not given any such order to anyone.

Khaleda's counsels however said quoting their client that when the draft agreement, which had been prepared by the previous Awami League government, was placed before her she gave a verbal order to continue what had been started by the previous government.

Experts in the energy ministry however said besides being the prime minister, Khaleda was also the chief of the energy ministry, so the responsibility of the ministry signing any deal, ultimately falls on her shoulder.

"Even if the Niko deal was signed by Mosharraf Hossain, the ultimate responsibility of awarding the job falls on her shoulder, who else could have taken the responsibility," an expert said.

Khaleda was the fourth defendant in the case questioned so far. The ACC on Wednesday questioned another defendant former energy secretary Shahidul Islam, while detained former law minister

Moudud Ahmed and detained AKM Mosharraf Hossain had been quizzed at jail gates earlier.

Another defendant in the case Vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif is absconding.

The task force team led by Investigation Officer (IO) also ACC Assistant Director SM Shahidur Rahman also included Maj Mustafa Kamal, CID Inspector Nurul Islam, and Deputy Tax Commissioner Shamimur Rahman.

Khaleda's two counsels AM Mahbub Uddin and Masud Ahmed Talukder were also present during the quizzing.

A Dhaka court on February 17 allowed the investigation team to quiz Khaleda following an application.

The case brought allegations against the accused of causing a loss of Tk 10,000 crore to the national exchequer by signing the deal with the Canadian company.

The investigation team also questioned businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun and former Dhaka Club president Selim Bhuiyan in connection with the case, both of whom are currently detained.

The ACC also questioned a number of bureaucrats of different ministries regarding the high profile case, and seized relevant files and documents.

The investigation team also made visits to some spots including Chhatai gas field and seized some documents from there.

Prof Jahanara

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Jahanara, one of the corruption suspects, owns three floors of a six-story building on five kathas of land in Bashundhara residential area, a three-story market in Dhaka City's Jindabazar Lane and a two-story building on 55 decimals of land in Rajbari.

There are two 5-katha plots in Bashundhara residential area and a 10-katha plot in Purbachal in her name while there is another 5-katha plot in Bashundhara in his son's name. Jahanara also owns two Toyota cars, the statement said.

Jahanara has 60 tolas of gold while her son 120 tolas. She has one revolver and a pistol. She also has about Tk 65 lakh and \$ 11,654 in banks in addition to furniture and electronic goods worth Tk 5.14 lakh.

Panna submitted his wealth statement to the ACC the same day. He claimed that he has inherited 7 bighas of land in Bagerhat, 6 bighas of land in Pirojpur and a house on 2.5 katha of land in Pirojpur town. He owns a 1400sqf flat in Siddeswar, a 3060sqf flat in Banani in the city and a 5-katha plot in Tongi, Gazipur.

Panna has 20 tolas of gold while his wife 50 tolas. He has one Toyota car, one short-gun and fixed deposit of Tk 20 lakh.

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Mistrust keeps unification

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Even party Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain does not know anything in this regard and no one discussed the matter with him, pro-Khaleda leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told The Daily Star Tuesday.

Some leaders in the Saifur Rahman-led faction, on the other hand, have expressed doubts about Hannan's claim made on Tuesday that unification of BNP is in the final stage. They said Hannan is trying to achieve personal interest in the name of unity.

"I do not know anything about the unification process but I think he [Hannan] is trying to strengthen his control in his faction," a leader of the pro-Saifur faction told The Daily Star yesterday.

Leaders close to Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who was expelled by the chairperson but was reinstated by the standing committee, also ruled out Hannan's claim.

On Tuesday, Hannan declined to divulge any detail of the unification process but said the party would be united as per the expectation of party leaders and workers.

Asked about Hannan's claim, Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan, another adviser to the chairperson and a leader of the pro-Saifur faction, told The Daily Star on Wednesday that he is not aware that a consensus is being reached regarding the party's unity.

A group of leaders close to Hannan Shah also claimed that leaders of both the factions have reached a consensus in principle on some crucial issues to unite the party. They, however, said discussion on these matters will continue.

According to them, the leaders of the two factions agreed in principle to avoid the decisions of the October 29 meeting held at Saifur Rahman's Gulshan residence and that after getting free the party chairperson will take the final decision regarding the expulsion of

Mannan Bhuiyan, Ashraf Hossain and Mofiqul Hasan Tripti.

They said the leaders of the pro-Khaleda faction agreed not to force the pro-Saifur faction to cancel the October 29 meeting and that all leaders of the faction except the expelled ones would enjoy their previous party posts.

However, most leaders of the Saifur-led faction do not want any unity keeping the expelled leaders away.

"Leaders of both the factions want to bring unity in the party by keeping a win-win situation," a leader of the pro-Saifur faction told The Daily Star.

Khaleda Zia expelled Bhuiyan and Ashraf before her arrest in September last year while chairperson appointed Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain expelled Tripti accusing him of anti-party activities.

Nat'l ID registration

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The proposed ordinance incorporates provision of imprisonment and fine if someone provides false information, obtains more than one national ID card, distorts and damages information in the card and tampers with it.

To tamper with the national ID card will be considered as cognizable and non-bailable offence. Punishment provision for NIRA officials would also be in the ordinance for their neglect of duties.

The proposed statutory body will be able to settle an agreement with any person or organisation to discharge its work. But to do the same with a foreign government or international organisation it would require prior approval from the home ministry.

ACC permitted

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On September 5 last year, ACC Assistant Commissioner Mahbubul Alam filed the case with Motijheel Police Station on charge of withdrawing over Tk 158.67 crore from IFIC Bank in the name of Beximco Group through cheating and forgery.

Other accused in the case are former managing director of IFIC Bank Ataul Haque, ex-manager of IFIC Bank's Motijheel branch Asab-ud-Doula and directors of Beximco Holdings Ltd Iqbal Ahmed and MA Qasim.

In the case, the complainant said the accused in connivance with each other took out the amount as loans submitting seven wills of 130.42 acres of land of Beximco Properties Development Management and showing false wills of Beximco Holdings as equitable mortgage. The accused also showed 112 fake bank accounts of the organisations.

Bird flu

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upazila of Narayanganj in the last two days, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

Livestock officials culled 2,265 chickens and destroyed 8,200 eggs at the KMP farm of Ehsanuddin on Wednesday night. Later, they culled 3,465 chickens and destroyed 6,712 eggs.

They also killed 2,495 chickens and destroyed 4,490 eggs at the farm of Hazi Afazuddin as it is located within one kilometre of the bird flu infected farm.

Out of 1,900 farms in Narayanganj, only 26 have been found infected with avian influenza so far, sources said.

Meanwhile, livestock officials culled about 7,500 chickens at two poultry farms at Tukberazar in Sylhet on Wednesday night and yesterday, reported our staff correspondent from Sylhet.

They also killed about 4,000 chickens at nearby Bismillah Poultry Farm yesterday. The officials also culled chickens in some poultry shops and houses situated within one kilometre of the infected poultry farm.

Besides, 180 chickens were culled in Munshiganj while 494 chickens in Jessor following detection of avian influenza, bird flu control room sources said.

Ex-OC Rafique

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A group of miscreants hurled grenades at the AL rally leaving 24 leaders and workers of the party dead and 300 others injured.

On November 1 last year, Harkat-ul Jihad Al Islami (Huji) leader Mufti Mohammad Hannan and two others of the banned outfit admitted to carrying out the August 21 grenade attack to kill Awami League President and former premier Sheikh Hasina.

Later, three more Huji members confessed before magistrates on different dates that they were involved in the attack.

Three arrestees including Joj Miah had given confessional statements earlier and disclosed names of several members of Seven Star group who were allegedly involved in the attack.

Law enforcers arrested 30 more people in connection with the case. Of them, 21 were granted bail by the High Court and judge's court on different dates.

Transit route

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which largely serves to ship drugs to Canada and South Africa, citing the seizure of 550kg of ephedrine in February 2007.

The Vienna-based body also reported the increasing availability of Indian heroin in Bangladesh, along with Indian codeine based cough syrup, sold locally as Phensidyl.

Citing lax prescription controls that are not adequately enforced at the retail level, "The Board urges the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen controls over the distribution of pharmaceutical preparations at all levels."

The board also called on the government to "Attach high priority to drug control issues and to ensure that all partners involved in the implementation of the national drug control strategy have the support and resources necessary to enable them to carry out their activities."

Drug abuse has also spread to rural areas with heroin, Phensidyl and cannabis being the most frequently abused drugs.

The board also noted that increased drug trafficking in Bangladesh could further worsen the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country.

Chief adviser

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press briefing in the evening on the outcome of the advisory council's meeting held at Barisal Circuit House earlier yesterday.

The chief adviser hoped that the ongoing dialogue between the Election Commission (EC) and the political parties would complete soon.

Asked about the return of criminals after serving their jail terms or those who were not arrested, he said the law will take its own course. "If any criminal comes out of their hideouts and if there are any specific allegations against them, they will be arrested," he said, adding that he has already directed law enforcers to arrest such criminals.

In the morning, the Council of Advisers at its meeting took a number of decisions, including setting up of an engineering college in Barisal and a 50MW rural power plant in Bhola in May next, for socio-economic development of the country's southern region.

The meeting also decided to extend the ongoing special VGF programme for 2.6 million families of the cyclone-hit areas for the December-March period.

The government launched the special VGF programme for 2.6 million families of the cyclone-hit areas for the December-March period.

The chief adviser told the press that a committee comprising UGC and education ministry officials will soon visit Barisal and talked to local elite and the administration to select a site for the proposed university in Barisal.

It was the second meeting of the advisory council outside Dhaka after the first one held in Rangpur on February 2.

About resuming the operation of Barisal Airport, Fakhruddin said a proposal from non-resident Bangladeshis to operate the airport under STOL services would be implemented soon.

Regarding issuance of passports at the district level, he said the government is actively considering the matter giving priority to those districts from where maximum number of people go abroad.

Her said the meeting also asked the department concerned to cultivate BR-47 variety of saline-tolerant paddy in the southern region as it showed good results in Sathkhira.

On weather forecasting system, he said a step for simplifying the weather forecasting system will be taken in the next few months.

Advisers, special assistants to the chief adviser, the cabinet secretary and secretaries concerned attended the meeting.

Fakhruddin will stay overnight at Barisal Circuit House as he will visit Golachipa in Pataukhali this morning. He is scheduled to return to Dhaka at noon.

In the afternoon, the chief adviser went to Sridhrit Rajapur upazila of Jhalakathi.

Addressing a views-exchange

Appeal courts

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section 11 of the EPR, a higher court must adjudicate any appeal against a lower court verdict on a corruption case within 90 days of filing the appeal.

The rules also state that the HC cannot stay a lower court verdict on corruption cases or release on bail since a convicted person until the adjudication of their appeal.

However, granting bail to Sigma and Helal the HC said according to its jurisdiction it can grant bail to convicts in cases under the EPR when their appeal against the conviction is pending.

Asked if yesterday's SC verdict restricts the HC's jurisdiction of granting bail in this regard, ACC counsel Anisul Huq said the judgment is the interpretation of some sections of the EPR.

Advocate Khanekar Mahbubuddin Ahmed moved for Helal while Advocate Mahbubul Rahman and barrister Azminal Hossain moved for Sigma in this case.

27th BCS exam

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Dr Saadat Hussain, also a former cabinet secretary, said they are trying to bring changes in the examination system for recruiting public servants as the existing system has flaws.

While speaking at the programme, Regulatory Reforms Commission Chairman Dr Akbar Ali Khan suggested that separate examinations should be held for different cadres.

Asked whether the PSC is thinking of holding separate examinations, Dr Saadat said they had not made any decision in this regard.

Hasina

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Meeting at Rajapur Degree College ground, he said the caretaker government is moving fast towards the general election.

He said the objective of the government is also to consolidate the foundation of democratic government, establish good governance and a Bangladesh free from corruption, terrorism and poverty.

Fakhruddin stressed the need for increased agricultural production.

Referring to the increased prices of paddy, rice, wheat and edible oils all over the world, he said there is no alternative to increasing farm production to get rid of the adverse impact of the increased prices.

He said the government for the first time allocated a big amount of money for agriculture research and is keeping close watch on smooth supply of fertiliser to the farmers in time at fair price.

He called for using every inch of arable land for production.

On his way back to Barisal, the chief adviser got down at Dhapar in Nalchitupazila and exchanged views with the locals.

PPP delays

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who effectively led the party when Benazir was in exile from 1999 to 2007.

Party officials said a decision may not be announced until parliament convenes, which is expected in mid-March.

The delay in choosing a premier comes amid general uncertainty about the political direction of the country and the fate of Musharraf.

He said the government