

Khaleda denies

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that Khaleda at one stage of questioning questioned 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 Mahub 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 from the IO.

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 Chhatak 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-storied building on five kathas of land in Basundhara residential area, a three-storied market in Dhaka City's Jindabahal Lane and a two-storied building on 55 decimals of land in Rajbari.

There are two 5-katha plots in Basundhara residential area and a 10-katha plot in Purbachal in her name while there is another 5-katha plot in Basundhara 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 kathas of land in Pirojpur town. He owns a 1400sq ft flat in Siddeswari, a 3060sq ft 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.

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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thoroughly.

"But she didn't agree, and instead suggested that we form a medical board immediately," Dr Abdullah told The Daily Star last night.

He said since the AL chief wants now it is the responsibility of the jail authorities as well as the government to form a board.

Earlier on Wednesday, Hasina was examined by Dr Shaila Khatun, Dr Baren Chakravarty and Dr Abdullah. The jail authorities might call two others—ENT specialist Prof Pran Gopal Dutta and eye specialist Prof Modasser Ali—within a couple of days to see her.

Prof Pran Gopal will make recommendations whether the AL chief needs any treatment abroad for her ears, said doctors who have already visited her.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Deputy Inspector General (prisons) Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui said, "The doctors have suggested that the Awami League president get admitted to a hospital, but she did not respond positively."

He added, "We hope she would agree to be hospitalised for the sake of her better treatment."

After checking Hasina, Prof MU Kabir Chowdhury prescribed some medicines and advised three blood tests for allergy. According to the doctors, she would have to have at least 20 diagnostic tests.

Earlier on February 21, Hasina was taken to Square Hospital for a medical checkup, first since her arrest, but as she was not prepared for any tests she was returned to the special jail. However, a 10-member medical team examined her that time.

Upazila elections

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Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain, said first the government should send a formal proposal for upazila elections, and then the EC will decide what would be the next course of action.

Yesterday's meeting, the EC did not discuss the adviser's announcement. Instead, for over two hours they reviewed different political parties' opinions on electoral reforms, sources said.

Requesting not to be named, an election commissioner said the commission is not ready to hold upazila elections in May. "If the government puts pressure on us, we'd have to say sorry."

A senior official of the EC Secretariat told The Daily Star, "We don't have any plan for upazila elections in May. We are strictly following the electoral roadmap. We don't know why the adviser came up with such an announcement."

Another senior official seeking anonymity said the government's move to hold local government elections might invite trouble if it is challenged at the High Court.

"A caretaker government does not have the jurisdiction to initiate steps to hold polls to local government bodies," the official said referring to the constitution.

Article 58D (2) of the constitution says the non-party caretaker government shall give the EC all possible aid and assistance required for holding the general election.

During the dialogue with the EC, major political parties strongly opposed local government polls before the ninth parliamentary election, saying that it would hamper the preparations for the general election by the year-end.

CEC Huda however assured them that elections to four city corporations and seven municipalities would cause no obstacle to parliamentary elections by December.

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 as a member 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 (ret'd) 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.

Janakantha editor

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There are seven other cases, including three for building design frauds, against the Janakantha editor. Verdict in another case against him will be announced on Sunday.

The joint forces arrested Masud on March 7, 2007 from Janakantha building in Eskaton and he has been in custody since then. Asaduzzaman is absconding and was tried in absentia.

According to case statement, Atiqullah Khan Masud submitted two designs to Rajuk for approval on June 26, 1990 for constructing a nine-storey and a six-storey buildings on Hosseini Dalan Road.

Asaduzzaman managed a forged copy of Rajuk approval for the designs, instead of bringing the matter to the notice of building construction committee of Rajuk, and sent it to Masud's Globe Constructions.

As a result, Masud was benefited Tk 6.03 crore, the case statement added.

The case statement also said that Akram helped in getting rid of the file containing the forged copy of approval of the building designs.

Clarification

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actually owns 17 bighas of land in Manohardi and 177.3 decimals of land in the same area.

Our Reply

The report was based on information provided to the press by the Anti-Corruption Commission. According to the information, Bakul's wife owns shares worth over Tk 5.29 crore while Bakul owns one fourth of 17 bighas of land in Narsingdi, two buildings and three tin-shed houses on the land as inherited property and 173 decimals of land in Narsingdi.

Huda, Faruk

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authorities failed to produce Faruk and Huda before the court on security grounds.

The jail authorities, meantime, explained to the court why they could not turn in Faruk and Huda to the court on March 2 in connection with the case. The court served a show-cause notice on the authorities on March 2 in this regard.

The explanation, sent to the public prosecutor, said adequate security is required to escort condemned prisoners to court, but armed police security was not available on that day.

As the two condemned convicts could not be produced before the court twice in a week on security reasons, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner submitted an application to the home secretary yesterday, seeking the trial of the accused at a special court adjoining Dhaka Central Jail.

Four other arrestees -- Mohammad Shahjahan, George Miah, Golam Sarwar and Freedom Sohail -- were produced before the court. Four people, who posted bail in the case -- Mizanur Rahman, Humayun Kabir, Khandaker Amirul Islam and Gazi Imam Hossain -- were present during yesterday's hearing.

The five other accused -- Lt Col (ret'd) Abur Rashid, Zafar Ahmed, Nazmul Maksud, Humayun Kabir (2) and Rezauddin Islam -- are on the run. According to a prosecution, a group of Freedom Party activists hurled bombs and fired shots on the house of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 11 night in 1989 in a bid to kill Sheikh Hasina who was staying in the house at the time. Later, they left the scene on two vehicles chanting 'Faruk-Rashid Zindabad' slogan.

Havildar Jahirul Haque filed a general diary with Dhannondhi Police Station. Later, an investigation was conducted in this regard.

Three accused in the case had given confessional statements to magistrates disclosing the names of others involved in the incident. They said they opened fire and exploded bombs to kill Hasina on Faruk, Rashid and Huda's orders.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against 16 people including Faruk, Huda and Rashid on February 20 in 1997. But the trial could not begin in the last 11 years due to legal tangles.

The case was transferred to the present court on February 17 this year for quick disposal.

Earlier, Huda, Faruk and Rashid were sentenced to death in the Bangabandhu murder case and were given life imprisonment in the jail killing case.

Nat'l ID registration

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will be appointed as member of NIRA, which would appoint its own staffs.

The proposed body would also be entitled to appoint a person or organisation as consultant to discharge its special duty.

NIRA's main task would be to collect, examine and preserve information, data and biometric features of the citizens, register those, and issue national ID cards. It would also fix and collect fees from the citizen for providing ID cards and other services.

According to fixed procedure, any person or organisation may apply to get information from NIRA, which will preserve information updating (if any citizen dies) it in coordination with birth and death registration.

Though EC collects only photograph, signature, prints of thumbs and point finger during voter registration NIRA will collect photograph, finger print, hand geometry, palm print, iris, facial recognition, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), signature and voice, according to draft ordinance.

The draft categorically mentions that for obtaining some facilities and services a citizen must show their national ID cards.

A citizen would need ID card to obtain and renew passport, driving licence, tax payer identification number (TIN), business identification number (BIN), bank loan, trade licence, government's subsidy and assistance; to apply for jobs, open bank account, withdraw government allowances, purchase and sell immovable property, participate in different insurance schemes, for transport registration, marriage and divorce registration, identifying voters in different polls; to get gas, water, electricity, telephone and mobile phone connections and open share application and Beneficiary Ownership Accounts.

To obtain the national ID card, a citizen will have to apply to the authorities through fixed procedures. The issued national ID card will be cancelled if anyone loses their citizenship.

A citizen would be able to correct information, if necessary, even after issuing national ID card and apply for a new one if lost.

Pak army

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political process.

"He pointed out that any kind of schism, at any level, under the circumstances would not be in the larger interest of the nation," the military said in a statement.

"He reiterated that the army would stay out of the political process and expressed his hope that the army would not be dragged into any unnecessary controversy."

Kayani called for a "harmonised relationship between various pillars of the state, as provided in the constitution, in order to maximize national effort," the statement said.

Pakistan's military has ruled the country for more than half of the 61 years since independence from Britain in 1947.

Musharraf, a former general, seized power from former premier Nawaz Sharif in a coup in 1999 and maintained his grip over both the presidency and the military until, under pressure, he stepped down as army chief in November.

Buriganga capsizes

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the Sadarghat-Taltola route since June last year. It sailed with passengers more than double its capacity from Sadarghat on the day of the accident that left 48 dead.

Before sailing, every launch must get clearance from Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) traffic inspectors that it is carrying passengers and goods according to its capacity. Sources at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal said the BIWTA traffic inspectors often give clearance to launches carrying double or more its capacity in exchange for a hefty bribe.

The findings suggest how a section of the BIWTA officials and surveyors of the Department of Shipping (DOS) indulge in corruption.

The probe committee, however, found the sand-laden vessel that struck MV Shourav-1 in the stern has almost all its documents in order. The surveyor of that vessel gave the survey token despite it being 2.3 metres longer than it was supposed to be.

The report said after the sand-laden vessel hit the launch in the stern both the vessels tried to stay starboard causing another collision and the cargo vessel finally ran over the sinking launch.

"Such accidents suggest that masters of both the vessels had serious deficiency in vessel manoeuvre training," the report mentioned.

The probe committee headed by joint secretary of the Ministry of Shipping recommended a permanent accident investigation cell.

As recommendations made by different probe committees formed after launch disasters are yet to be implemented, the latest probe committee suggested that the proposed permanent accident investigation cell would take up the task to implement the recommendations.

The committee also suggested creation of posts and recruitment of marine police as there is no authority at present to oversee river traffic rules in the waterways.

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 cognisable 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 Motihel 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 Motihel branch Asad-ul-Doula and directors of Beximco Holdings Ltd Iqbal Ahmed and MA Qasem.

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 Tuberbar 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 Jessore 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.

Former deputy minister and BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu was arrested and placed on remand in connection with the case.

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 rental power plant in Bhola in May next, for socioeconomic development of the country's southern region.

The meeting also decided to extend the ongoing special VGF programme in the Sidr-affected areas for another two months until May.

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 Satkhira.

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 Patuakhali this morning. He is scheduled to return to Dhaka at noon.

In the afternoon, the chief adviser went to Sidr-hit Rajapur upazila of Phalakhali.

Addressing a views-exchange

Appeal courts

FROM PAGE 1
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 such 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.

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