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EC's only objective is to hold polls by '08: CEC

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the only objective of the Election Commission (EC) is to hold parliamentary polls by 2008.

"Many people might say many things. But we do not want to be misguided by their utterances," Huda told journalists at the conference room of the Election Commission.

Responding to the demand for his resignation by a faction of the BNP, the CEC said the EC would forge ahead with its goal.

On holding the local government elections in opposition to the political parties, Huda said the EC

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Rice, edible oil prices go up further

Rice-laden trucks stranded on borders amid fresh Indian restriction; big oil traders allegedly hoarding

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Prices of two essential commodities, rice and edible oil, went up further on local markets over the last two days.

The prices went up mainly due to an imposition of a fresh restriction on rice export by the Indian government on Saturday, and due to hoarding of edible oil by some local large scale traders and mill owners, traders of the commodities said yesterday.

The Indian government in a

sudden move imposed a fresh restriction on export of coarse rice, barring export of the essential commodity at prices lower than US\$650 a ton.

Since the imposition of new restriction, Indian traders have been asking Bangladeshi importers to amend their letters of credit (LC) for being able to get their rice imports, for which they had opened LCs at the previous rate of \$505 a ton more than a month ago.

But due to the abruptness with which the price schedule had been changed the importers did not get

enough time to amend the LCs.

As a result, hundreds of rice-laden trucks, which had been scheduled to enter Bangladesh, were seen stranded at the Indian land port Petrapole across the border yesterday, our Benapole correspondent reported.

Our Chapainawabganj correspondent reported hundreds of rice-laden trucks were stranded on the Indian side across Sonamasjid landport.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reported 400 rice-laden trucks

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OCT 29 MEET Saifur rejects Hannan offer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

M Saifur Rahman, the standing committee-appointed acting chairman of BNP, has rejected pro-Khaleda leader Brig Gen (ret) Hannan Shah's proposal to cancel the decisions made by the party's standing committee on October 29.

"Hannan Shah sent me a letter with the proposal to cancel the decision of the meeting. But if we cancel the decision, why would a discussion be held?" said Saifur while speaking with reporters following his meeting with US Chargé d'Affaires.

The decisions taken by the standing committee at the meeting at his residence were to ensure democracy and accountability in the party, Saifur added.

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Dev outlay faces slash, revenue budget to balloon

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

The government is likely to revise the budget for the current fiscal year, by downsizing the development budget and expanding the revenue budget.

The revenue budget might be expanded by 16 percent -- mainly to cover additional expenditures in subsidies, social safety net programmes and interest payments on government borrowings.

The Tk 87,137 crore budget for the FY08 may exceed Tk 90,000 crore with the additional expenditure, a high official at the finance ministry told The Daily Star.

"The finance and planning ministries are now working out the revised budget and they will come up with revised figures by the end

of this month," said the official. Planning ministry sources said the total allocation for development budget for the FY08 was Tk 26,500 crore and the government is considering reducing it to Tk 22,500 crore.

The total size of the revenue budget, excluding Tk 7,523 crore for Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) as bonds, was Tk 53,114 crore and it may reach Tk 62,000 crore in the revised allocation.

According to a monthly report of the finance ministry on fiscal status as of December 2007, 46.8 percent of the total allocation for revenue expenditure has been spent in the first six months of the fiscal. On the other hand, the expenditure scenario of the devel-

opment budget is bleak as only 21 percent of it has been spent during the same period.

The government spent 59.6 percent of the total allocation for interest payments against government borrowings in the first six months, sources said adding that another Tk 300 crore might be needed only for the interest payments against domestic borrowings.

Sources said 51.5 percent of the total allocation for subsidies and other expenditure has been spent during the first half of the fiscal. "Expenditure against subsidies in the second half of the fiscal will be increased," said a source.

The government allocated Tk 1200 crore for the payment of

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Hasina should be sent abroad for ear treatment

Recommend her personal physicians

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three specialist doctors yesterday said detained Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina should be sent abroad immediately for treatment of her ears as she runs the risk of going completely deaf.

ENT specialist Prof Pran Gopal Dutta, ophthalmologist Prof Modasser Ali, and heart surgeon Dr MH Millat—all her personal physicians—examined the former prime minister for about two hours at the sub-jail and later placed the recommendations to the jail authorities.

"If she is not sent abroad for treatment she could become permanently deaf," said Prof Pran Gopal, adding that proper treatment of her ears is not possible here.

Talking to reporters after seeing Hasina, he said the AL chief cannot hear well with her left ear while she suffers a continuous noise in the right ear.

The doctors who met her

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

BARGE-MOUNTED PLANT GRAFT CASE Hasina stands in dock, doubts getting justice

Hearing on charge-framing adjourned till Mar 13

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The hearing on charge framing against Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and six others in the barge-mounted power plant graft case began yesterday.

After hearing the prosecution, Special Court-1 adjourned the proceedings till March 13 and also fixed the day for the defence submissions.

It was the seventh sitting since February 3 as the hearing was adjourned on previous six occasions.

Hasina, the now detained former prime minister, complained she was taken to the court despite her worsening health.

She was brought to the makeshift court at the MP Hostel on Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises at around 10:25am. On arrival, she told her lawyers, "By not allowing

my relatives and lawyers to be present, the court has in fact proved it is a trial in camera."

Later, standing in the dock, she said, "My fears that I won't get justice here have been confirmed since my lawyers and relatives have been kept out of the courtroom."

The defence lawyers told the court that police prevented their colleagues as well as the former prime minister's relatives from attending the day's proceedings. In reply, Judge Firoz Alam said there is no bar for a defendant's relatives to be around during the trial unless there is a concern for security.

After the day's proceedings, seven or eight of her relatives were allowed to talk with her.

The defence once again prayed for the hearing to be adjourned yesterday for what they said was their client's deteriorating health. Besides, they said, they could not

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A mobile court on Manik Mia Avenue in the capital inspects a truck to see if its exhaust is within the carbon emission standards of the country. The court fined several vehicles yesterday for failing to comply with the standards.

Biman leases Boeing-747 from Nigeria

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd has taken out a lease on a Boeing 747-200 from a Nigeria based airlines in a bid to minimise the disruptions in flight schedules.

"The 542-seater aircraft from Kabo Air Ltd will arrive at Zia International Airport by tomorrow or the day after tomorrow," a Biman high official told The Daily Star.

The national flag carrier has been facing serious troubles in maintaining flight schedules due to acute shortage of aircraft for quite some time now. With the new airbus, the number of Biman's aircraft will rise to 12.

Under the Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance and Insurance (ACMI) lease process, the Kabo Air will provide all staffs and crew of the wide-body aircraft while Biman will supply fuel.

The leased aircraft will serve Biman for at least six months and its lease might be extended after that, following a negotiation between the two sides.

"Under the lease condition,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



Exhausted from trying to sell the recliner he made, 75-year-old carpenter Nitai Chandra Mandal rests on it on a Gulistan street in the capital yesterday.

MPs' influence in local govt to go

Council nods to proposed amendment today

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The council of advisers to the caretaker government is set to finalise proposals for revoking power of members of parliament over upazila parishads and to empower the Election Commission (EC) to announce schedules for holding polls to the parishads.

"Finalising the proposed amendment to the Upazila Parishad Act is on the agenda for tomorrow's [Monday] cabinet meeting. If the council of advisers gives final approval, then the president will promulgate an ordinance amending the Upazila Parishad Act," Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) and

Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal told The Daily Star yesterday.

Once the Upazila Parishad Act is amended, the EC will be empowered to announce schedules for upazila elections.

"Once the law is amended, we will formally ask the Election Commission to initiate steps for holding polls to upazila parishads... even though the responsibilities for holding the upazila elections will lie on the commission after amendment to the law," the LGRD adviser said.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the EC would consider holding polls to

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Janakantha editor, Rajuk official get 7yrs in bldg design case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court dealing with corruption cases yesterday sentenced editor of the daily Janakantha Atiqullah Khan Masud to seven years' imprisonment for getting the design of a building approved from Rajdhani Unnayan Katrapakkha (Rajuk) illegally.

The other accused, Rajuk official SM Asaduzzaman was also awarded seven years' imprisonment.

Judge Tanzeena Ismail of Special Court-6, set up at the MP hostel on the National Parliament premises, also fined them Tk 7.56 crore, in default of which they have to spend a year more in jail.

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case with Motijheel Police Station on September 30, 2007 against three persons including the Janakantha editor.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Rupali sale deal to be cancelled today

REZAUUL KARIM BYRON and JASIM UDDIN KHAN

The government is going to cancel today the process of Rupali Bank sale to Saudi Prince Bandar Bin Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud after deals and negotiations for two years.

A proposal to cancel the overall sale process will be placed at the Advisory Committee on Economic Affairs meeting today.

The meeting chaired by Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam is also likely to decide the fate of the crisis-ridden state-owned bank.

The cancellation proposal carries detailed description of the selling process, which started in May 2005 when the government initially offered to sell 67 percent of the bank.

Several investors submitted expressions of interest with Prince

Bandar winning the contest. In February 2007, the government approved the sale of a further 26 percent to the prince.

The Saudi prince won two separate bids to take over the government's 93.26 percent shares of the bank with an offer of over \$458 million, while the rest of the shares remain as public issues.

In December last year, Prince Bandar in a letter to General Moeen U Ahmed, chief of army staff, said he was willing to pay only \$185 million instead of the \$458 million he offered last year.

In his letter the prince also heavily attacked the conduct of the Privatisation Commission and the finance ministry during the sale process, which he said had "been riddled with discrepancies and innuendos undercurrents."

The Privatisation Commission

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Dr Kamal blames parties for emergency

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday held major political alliances responsible for the promulgation of state of emergency in the country.

During a views-exchange meeting with members of Barisal Bar Association at its auditorium in Barisal yesterday, the eminent jurist emphasised the need for transferring power to an elected government as soon as possible.

Rivalries between political parties and unprecedented corruption by a section of political leaders created chaos in the country that led to 1/11 (promulgation of the state of emergency), he said, adding, "I am not pleading in favour of the present government but I must say that this situation created 1/11."

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NAT'L POLICY FOR WOMEN Implementation timeframe not fixed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government has announced the much-awaited national policy for women development to ensure equity for men and women in all spheres of life, it has not fixed any timeframe for its implementation.

The caretaker government will soon start implementing the short-term programmes but implementation of the long-term ones will depend on the will of the next governments, said Women and Children Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Choudhury yesterday.

The short-term programmes include raising maternity leave from four months to five months, ensuring appointment of equally qualified women to public posi-

tions, taking steps to stop the suffering of women working abroad, and launching special programmes to help women in distress like the disabled, she told The Daily Star yesterday.

As laid out in the National Women Development Policy 2008 announced Saturday, the government will initiate a process to abolish all laws that discriminate against women.

Key features of the policy include reserve one-third parliamentary seats for women and arranging direct election to them and enacting new laws to ensure equal opportunity for and control on all earned movable and immovable properties.

But the policy does not

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