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## ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH Ex-whip Suja gets 13yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Awami League lawmaker and former whip Mostafa Rashidi Suja was sentenced to 13 years' rigorous imprisonment by a special court in Dhaka yesterday for acquiring illegal wealth and providing false and baseless wealth statement.

The court also sentenced one of Suja's two wives, Khodeza Rashidi, to three years' simple imprisonment for abetting her husband in accumulating illegal wealth.

The judge of the Special Judge's Court-9 established on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex also

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## SERIAL BLASTS CASE 9 JMB cadres get life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Nine cadres of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were sentenced to rigorous life imprisonment yesterday for carrying out serial bomb blasts in Barguna on August 17 in 2005.

The court also fined them each Tk 5,000, defaulting on which will carry another six months in jail.

The convicts are Asadul Arif, Rezaul Karim, Hafez Mohammad Mostafa Hasan, Hafez Al Amin, Shahidul Islam, Masum Billah, Abdul Haque Abbasi, Hafez Abdur Rahman and boxer Shahid.

Other accused in the case were three kingpins of the outfit -- Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Siddique Islam alias Bangla Bhai and Ataur Rahman Sunny -- who were executed in March last year after being convicted of masterminding the murders of two Jhalakathi judges.

## Hearing starts on plea for stay on MiG-29 case

UNB, Dhaka

The hearing on an application seeking stay on the operation of the High Court verdict that revived the MiG-29 scam case against detained former prime minister Sheikh Hasina began at the Supreme Court yesterday.

Mahmudul Islam, a counsel for the Awami League president, moved the stay petition.

On September 6 last year, the High Court, upon an interim government petition, discharged Hasina's plea for quashing the charge of shady deal on purchase of eight fighter jets from Russia, clearing way for the case proceedings.

A seven-member full court of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin, heard the long-pending case.

Prior to adjourning the hearing, the apex court stayed for a day the proceedings of the case at Dhaka Divisional Special Court that had earlier fixed March 13 for appearance of the accused.

## Govt asked to return Hasina's passport

### New medical board formed to carry out check-up on her

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a latest development, a Dhaka Court yesterday directed the government to return the passport of detained Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina to its owner, who has been undergoing treatment in Square Hospital in the capital.

A new panel of seven physicians of the hospital was also formed yesterday for Hasina's medical check-up, who already started her medical tests.

Hasina's two personal physicians, ophthalmologist Dr Modasser Ali and medicine specialist Dr ABM Abdullah, who had been examining her health for the last couple of months and had been allowed frequently to enter the special jail, were not allowed to see



the former premier in the hospital yesterday.

Meanwhile, a negotiation is reportedly going on between the government and her family behind the curtain in a bid to settle amicably the terms and conditions of

Hasina's release from detention, for treatment in the US.

AL leader also a counsel of Hasina, Advocate Shahara Khatun, yesterday filed a petition with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court of Dhaka seeking immediate release of Hasina's passport. In the petition, Shahara said Hasina's passport, which had been seized by the joint forces on July 16 last year immediately after her arrest from her Sudha Sadan residence, might be needed any time for her trip abroad for treatment. "So the passport is needed," said Shahara in her petition.

After hearing the petition, Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani ordered the authorities concerned to return the passport to its owner.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## Petrobangla gets licence for first time to tap coal

### Ministry pushes for deal with obscure Korean consortium

SHARIER KHAN

In a landmark move, the government for the first time has awarded Petrobangla a license to explore Dighipara coal zone in a joint venture with a competent private mine developer, to be selected as the strategic partner through an open tender.

The government is letting Petrobangla form a partnership with a private mine developer to tap into the country's coal resources, with the prospect of needing billions of dollars of investment, if the exploration turns out to be successful, said a competent source.

The Bureau of Mineral Development (BMD) on February 27 granted the license to explore the 4,000 hectare Dighipara zone,

where high quality coal had been discovered before. It has 100 million tons of proven coal deposit and 600 million tons of probable deposit.

Petrobangla applied for the license in 2006.

However on Monday, the energy ministry started pushing Petrobangla to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an obscure South Korean consortium headed by a company named Luxon, in contradiction with the government's declared intention of putting out an open invitation for tenders.

Official documents show that letters sent to the Korean address of Luxon and to another member of the consortium, bounced back in the past and the Korean embassy also could not confirm the where-

abouts of those companies.

Yet the ministry on Monday decided to ask Petrobangla to frame a joint venture policy under which the MoU will be signed with the consortium.

"This is in clear contradiction with the ministry's earlier approval for seeking a strategic partner through an open tender for exploration and development of Dighipara coal zone," said a competent source.

Petrobangla already informed the ministry about the contradicting on February 25, clearly stating, "There is no scope for considering any draft MoU for Dighipara coal field development and for setting up a power plant at the mine mouth."

Petrobangla is waiting for the energy ministry to approve the

criteria for bidding for being a partner in the Dighipara coal exploration project. A meeting on the matter is scheduled for Sunday. Once the government approves the criteria for bidding, Petrobangla will go for publishing the tender schedule in the media.

With coal price soaring up to 110 dollars a ton globally due to high demand, investors are showing tremendous interest. Even the future domestic demand for coal is also projected at 13 million tons a year for the next 10 years, for generating additional power to meet the rising demand for the latter, as natural gas supply to generate power will not be able to cater to the demand for power.

Dighipara is one of the five identified areas where geologists

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## Over 10 lakh MT rice to be imported by June

### Claims food adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 10 lakh metric tons of rice will be imported through public and private channels chiefly from India and Myanmar by June, Food and Disaster Management Adviser AMM Shawkat Ali said yesterday.

Of this, the first consignment of 1 lakh out of 5 lakh metric tons of rice procured from India by the government will start arriving Saturday, the adviser told The Daily Star last night.

On March 17, Bangladesh officials will sit with their Indian counterparts to fix the date and other details of importing the rest 4 lakh metric tons from four trading houses nominated by the Indian government, he said.

Meanwhile, the ministry is going to place a proposal for purchasing 20,000 metric tons of rice from Myanmar at today's meeting of the purchase committee.

Asked whether the import will have positive impact in reducing the price of rice, the adviser said, "Availability (of rice) is not the problem; the main concern is the high price. The price in international market has gone up and supply in our local market was hampered due to natural disasters."

He, however, said the price will definitely come down after the Boro harvest in one and half months.

The local market had suffered the strongest blow in last year's

back-to-back flooding and cyclone Sidr, he added.

As of yesterday, the import of rice during the current fiscal year stands at 29.95 lakh metric tons, the adviser told The Daily Star adding that it will reach 40 lakh metric tons by June.

About the country of import, Shawkat Ali said that most of the rice will come from India and Myanmar and the private sector importers are also trying to import from Thailand and Pakistan.

Talking about arrival of the first consignment of rice from India, Shawkat Ali said that 8,000 metric tons of rice will be transported daily to Darshana in Chuadanga by train.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

The lake adjacent to a park at Uttara sector-13 in the capital is being polluted by household wastes and human excreta channeled through sewer pipes of Dhaka Wasa.

## Fresh hike soon in CNG, diesel, power prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to hike the prices of CNG by the end of this month and diesel and electricity after the Boro season to overcome the deficit in national economy.

Prof Dr M Tamim, special assistant to the chief adviser and in-charge of the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, said this yesterday.

"The government considers withdrawal of subsidy from the energy sector including CNG, diesel and electricity, which are mainly used in business purpose such as transport and industries," Dr Tamim said.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## Ex-Jamaat MP charged with kidnap bid, extortion

UNB, Ctg

Police yesterday pressed charges against former Jamaat lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury and 35 others in two separate cases--extortion and attempt to kidnap.

Sub-Inspector (SI) of Sankania Police Station Niamatul Karim submitted the charge sheets to the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court, Chittagong.

Sankania upazila Jamaat chief Dr Nurul Haq, Sankania Jamaat Secretary and Chairman of Kanchana Union Parishad

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## HR record worsens under emergency

### Observes US state department report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US Department of State in its annual report "Human Rights Practices 2007" on Bangladesh reveals that human rights record worsened in the country as the state of emergency continued to be in effect with elections remaining postponed.

The report mentions the arrests of former Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia after

repeated efforts of the caretaker government in the first six months since assuming power to force the two into exile failed. The two former premiers were kept under unofficial house arrest during this period, it adds.

The report says both Hasina and Khaleda were denied fair public trial as "the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court frequently overturned politically charged decisions by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court if

those rulings went against the government".

Citing different human rights organisations, the report says "preventative and arbitrary detentions" increased after the declaration of the state of emergency, particularly after the anti-graft drive was launched, with the arrests of approximately 200 former politicians, government officials and business leaders on suspicion of corruption, extortion and other

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## Coarse rice price unstable Edible oil, sugar price decrease

STAR REPORT

The price of coarse rice in the city market remains unstable with truckloads of rice stuck on the Indian side of the border due to export restrictions.

Although sugar and edible oil prices witnessed a major decrease in the wholesale market in the last two days, no impact of it has been observed on the retail market till yesterday.

Meantime, Indian rice exporters are facing mounting losses as around 2,000 trucks loaded with rice have been stranded at Petropole land port in India for the last five days, reports a correspondent from Benapole.

Visits to major wholesale markets in the capital -- Karwan Bazar, Badamtali, Babubazar and Mohammadpur Krishi Market --

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## CITY, MUNICIPALITIES Poll timetable only after local govt laws: CEC

UNB, Dhaka

Schedules for city corporation and municipal elections will not be declared until the Election Commission gets the gazette notification of the new laws governing the local bodies.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said this while talking to the journalists after a meeting with a delegation of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad (BHBBCOP) yesterday.

"I've clearly told the law adviser

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

## Last of the wild in concrete jungle

PINAKI ROY

A few species of mammals, reptiles and amphibians are fighting their seemingly last battle to survive in concrete jungles in the capital, either by taking refuge in the diminishing green patches or niches in structures.

"The city has expanded in such an unplanned way in the last three decades that almost entire wildlife habitat has already been destroyed," Dr Reza Khan, chief of Dubai Zoo and eminent wildlife expert of the country, told The Daily Star.

In the remaining green patches of the city, several avian species still flutter, though very few in numbers. Besides birds, some wild monkeys, jackals, mongoose, bats, and squirrels are still available.

In many parts of Old Dhaka, especially in Doyaganj, and sometimes in Mirpur rhesus monkeys are still seen on rooftops, rain sheds and even on balconies. Local residents and animal lovers regularly feed the groups to keep the near-extinct species alive.

Some residents around the Botanical Garden said still some jackals howl in the area.

"I have seen some jackals even in this winter lying with their cubs," said a man living in Pallabi (extension) just beside the Botanical Garden.

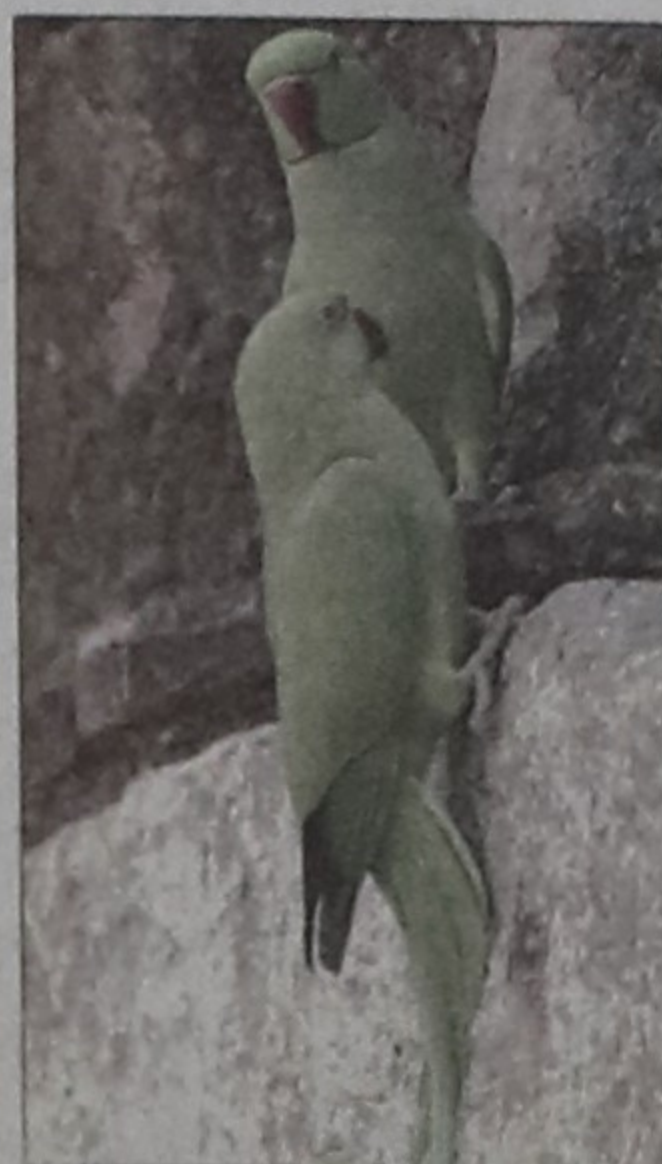


PHOTO: DR REZA KHAN

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Clockwise from top, the common toad, purple-rumped sunbird, monkey, striped palm squirrel and parrot can still be found at various places in the capital.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## BNP UNIFICATION Hannan says he is ready to meet Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah yesterday said he is ready to meet Saifur Rahman, leader of the other faction of the party, if the latter invites him.

"Although many people are scared of having tea at his [Saifur] house, I shall surely go there if he invites me," Hannan told reporters at his Mohakhali residence.

Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, secretary general of the party faction led by M Saifur Rahman, said on Tuesday that Hannan Shah could meet Saifur to discuss the issue of bringing unity in the party.

Responding to another comment of Hafiz that the BNP standing committee members should take the responsibility to run the party, Hannan said most committee members, executive committee leaders and grassroots level leaders and workers are not with the Saifur-led group.

"How can he claim himself as the acting secretary general of the party?" Hannan said.

BNP acting Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed said Khaleda Zia-

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5