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CA reaffirms pledge to hold credible polls within deadline

UNB, London

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed has said the main motto of his government is to hold a free, fair and acceptable parliamentary election by the set deadline as no one wants to return to the nightmarish days before January 11, 2007.

"More than half of the voter list has been prepared, election rules and regulations are at the final stage and we're going to have a free, fair and credible election," he told a meeting with the representatives of the Bangladeshi community at the UNB yesterday evening.

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KHALEDA'S RELEASE BNP to submit memorandum to chief adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP leaders of pro-Khaleda faction have decided to submit a memorandum to the chief adviser demanding unconditional release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia as well as other political detainees by March 25.

They will also sit with the leaders of other political parties for having dialogue if the interim administration finalises the decision of holding the local government polls before the national election.

BNP chairperson's adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah disclosed it to reporters after holding a meeting with acting BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed at the former's residence in the city's Mohakhali yesterday evening.

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2,500 MT rice arrives as talks with India on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 2,500 tonnes of rice at a cost of \$399 per tonne arrived in Bangladesh from India yesterday, said Food Director Ilaiah Dad Khan after a meeting with the visiting Indian delegation.

"Another 2,500 tonnes of rice is expected to arrive in the country through Darshana land port today. This is the beginning of import of 1 lakh tonnes of rice from India as per the earlier agreement between the two governments," Khan said.

He said no final decision was made in the first day's meeting on import of 4 lakh tonnes of rice as some issues in this connection are yet to be finalised.

The Indian team is scheduled to come to the Office of the Directorate General of Food today for another round of talks toward striking the final deal to import 4 lakh tonnes of rice, Khan said.

When asked, the food director said in the first day's meeting they did not discuss the price issue, rather they discussed the issues like performance guarantee, mode of payment, timeframe, mode of

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PRESIDENT PROMULGATES ORDINANCE CJ-led panel to suggest SC judges' recruitment

SC Bar chief says the act is against constitution

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday promulgated an ordinance to set up a Supreme Judicial Commission that will recommend to the president names for appointment of additional judges to the High Court (HC).

The eagerly anticipated rule

came as part of government measures to do away with room for politicisation in the appointment of judges to the HC and Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court (SC).

However, Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Barrister Amir Ul Islam slammed it for not setting any criteria, quali-

ties and qualifications for one to be a judge.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, he said, "The most important thing is to fix those criteria first. As a matter of fact, article 95(2) (c) of the constitution provides for other qualifications to be prescribed by law."

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Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) workers demolish yesterday an extension of Sonargaon Hotel built in the Hatirjheel wetland in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

Govt mulls making railway public limited company

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is actively considering turning the state-run Bangladesh Railway (BR) into a public limited company (PLC) on suggestions of the Asian Development Bank.

The parliament, however, would take the final decision in this regard on completion of a 44-month study, which began in last October, by a consultant group.

The loss-making railway cannot survive unless it is turned into a business organisation, Communications Secretary Mohammad Mahabubur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that the government is seriously working on the proposal to turn the loss-maker into a PLC.

He criticised the railway staffers for years of poor service records but said the government would consider that they do not lose their jobs as "they're very efficient but lack motivation for public service."

The BR earned Tk 456.31 crore in revenue against Tk 929.61 crore in operational expenditure during 2006-2007 fiscal year, officials said.

In October last year, the government embarked on the \$430 million Bangladesh Railway Reform and Improvement Project, to be completed in phases by 2012. The ADB is financing the project on the condition that the railway be corporatised.

The reform agenda also includes modernisation of stations, improvement in services and transparency at all levels.

Pricewaterhouse Coopers India Limited was appointed as consultant for the five-year project and has already started the 44-month study. The firm will submit its report in phases.

It submitted a primary report on lines of business (LOB) on February 28 where it said inadequate recruitment is straining key railway functions.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

NARSINGDI 7 to die for killing 6 of a family

UNB, Narsingdi

A court here yesterday awarded death sentence to seven people for killing six members of a family at Bhelanagar in Narsingdi Pourasava (municipality) area last year.

Additional District and Sessions Judge AKM Abul Kashem pronounced the judgment at his court at noon.

The condemned convicts -- Akhtaruzzaman Biru, 30, Dhud Miah, 28, Sharif Bhuiyan, 32,

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EC considering holding nat'l, upazila polls simultaneously

Says CEC

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) has firmly decided to hold upazila elections and is considering whether the national and upazila polls can be done simultaneously.

"Maybe, We've not decided yet. We're a thinking whether the national and upazila elections can be done on the same day," Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday told journalists when asked if the

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Govt moves to cancel Nam flat allotments

CA's office asks housing ministry to take steps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief adviser's office directed the housing and public works ministry to initiate steps to cancel allotments of Nam flats to former lawmakers occupying those now, and to ask them to pay increased rents after getting fresh allotments, said housing ministry officials.

The move came on the heels of March 17 publication of a report in The Daily Star headlined 'Row over control of Nam apartments;

Ministry, JS Secretariat at odds over increased rents'.

Sources said the ministry might soon send a letter to the speaker of the now dissolved eighth parliament with a deadline in this regard.

The housing and public works ministry received the instruction on Sunday in response to its letter to the CA's office informing the latter about the status of realising the revised rents --- Tk 20,000 a month for a 1,250sqft flat and Tk 25,000 a month for a 1,800sqft flat --

for the ex-lawmakers who are presently occupying about 160 Nam apartments in the capital.

The rents were increased from Tk 400 and Tk 500 in line with recommendations of a committee formed by the Parliament Secretariat last year to work out a policy for Nam flat allotments as the parliament had not been in place for a long time.

Complying with the committee's recommendations, the ministry

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Court unhappy over Hasina's hospitalisation without its permission

Asks for report on her condition, treatment by March 23

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court, hearing a graft case against detained former premier Sheikh Hasina and seven others, yesterday expressed its astonishment over the activities of the jail authorities as she had been hospitalised

without taking permission from the court.

Judge Firoz Alam of the special court 1, set up at MP Hostels on National Parliament premises in the capital, also expressed his astonishment, as the jail authorities had not

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Annisul Huq-led panel leading in FBCCI polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Annisul Huq-led panel was leading in the biennial election to the country's apex trade body, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), held yesterday.

According to the latest results, out of 12 posts of FBCCI directors, 11 were clinched by candidates from Annisul's chamber-group panel while rival MA Rouf Chowdhury-led panel got only one post.

Winners from Annisul-led

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Annisul Huq

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Clearly Ahead

Negative perceptions of stability to impede development, growth Says UNDP chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis yesterday said negative perceptions about political stability would hurt the country's development process and its economic growth.

"If political stability and expectations are negative, it would hamper the country's development and investment climate. And therefore, its economic growth," said Dervis at a press briefing on the eve of his departure at the VIP terminal of Zia International Airport.

However, Dervis was hopeful that the government would hold elections to allay any fears of prolonged political uncertainty. "I have full confidence and expect that the election will be held by the end of this year."

"From what I have heard in my meetings [with government officials], the elections will be held in time, and will be free and fair," said Dervis adding, "Bangladesh stands



Kemal Dervis

as well as adjusting to global price rises.

He said expansion of energy, food and export sectors are three of the most important issues facing Bangladesh and assistance from the international community is required to face these challenges.

"We have to convince the donors and policymakers in the donor countries," said Dervis, citing an upcoming World Bank and International Monetary Fund meeting in April.

He also said to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, Bangladesh needs to do more for the development of industries and improvement of its performance in maternal health.

Asked to comment on Bangladesh's human rights situation, he said any violation of human rights is a "huge problem", but these problems exist elsewhere in the world and "life has to go on".

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