

## Mad rush to buy rice

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outlets noticed that the majority of the people in the lines for rice were women -- some cradling their toddlers in their arms, having a hard time to save their children from the unbearable summer heat.

Many of these women arrived at the outlets early in the morning to secure a front spot in the line, said sources at the outlets.

Shahnur Begum, a slum dweller at Duanipara in Pallabi who came to the BDR outlet located near Pallabi police station, told The Daily Star that she along with her adolescent daughter had been standing in line since 3:00 in the morning.

After standing in the line for nine hours, her daughter fell sick due to the heat and scuffle among the customers, she said adding that locals had to take her daughter home.

"As the BDR started selling rice at 9:00am, a scuffle broke out to get ahead of the line. My daughter started crying and at one point she passed out. She could not bear the scuffle or the blistering heat," she said.

"After a long struggle, I got five kg of rice at around 2:30pm," said the visibly exhausted woman wearing a smile of satisfaction. "I am happy now since it is good for at least two days."

Covering their heads with shopping bags, at least 1,000 people were seen standing in lines for rice at noon at Nawabganj BDR outlet. Many of the elderly in the lines were seen quivering due to the heat.

Although a separate line is supposed to be formed for the disabled, pregnant women, garment workers and the elderly, the correspondents saw only a single line at BDR outlets on Zakir Hossain Road, Salimullah Road and Ring Road at Mohammadpur, Indira Road, Mirpur 10, Pallabi, Azampur staff quarter ground and Nawabganj.

When asked, BDR members at Nawabganj said the people who spend hours in line do not prefer separate lines. The BDR, however, makes special effort to sell rice to the people from the particular group, they added.

Col Mujibul Haq, BDR commander in Dhaka, said the BDR is trying hard to tackle the rush for rice. They are also considering increasing the number of lines to ease sufferings of the people, he added.

**Elderly asthma patient Amir Ali** Sikder had to step aside for a while after standing in line since early morning. "I am an asthma patient and I could not breathe standing amidst the huge crowd. That's why I often come out of the line just to take some long breath," he said.

When asked why he had to come to the outlet at such an age, Amir replied, "My son is a tea vendor on footpath and her wife takes care of my grandchildren. My conscience brought me here because I feel bad sitting around while day after day my

## Mugabe aides discuss ceding power

AP, Harare

Advisers of President Robert Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai are discussing the possibility of Zimbabwe's longtime leader relinquishing power, a businessman close to the electoral commission and a lawyer close to the opposition told The Associated Press.

The businessman said Mugabe has been told he is far behind Tsvangirai in preliminary results of Saturday's presidential elections and that there could be an uprising if Mugabe were declared the winner. The lawyer said advisers to both men were discussing a "transitional arrangement."

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

However, the secretary-general of Tsvangirai's party, Tendai Biti, dismissed the reports, saying "It's rubbish."

Independent observers say trends indicate Tsvangirai won the most votes in the presidential race, but not enough to avoid a runoff, a prospect that could be humiliating to the 84-year-old president.

## Prof Wahiduddin

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aplenty on food situation, but the food policy should not be determined on the basis of unauthentic information.

He went on, "According to Bangladesh Bank statistics, we have surplus in rice grains, but in reality we are now importing rice to cover production shortfall."

Mahabub Hossain, executive director of Brac, delivered the keynote speech. He said the price of rice might mark a slight fall after the Boro harvest, but the possibility of purchasing rice from international market at lower cost is little.

"It is the beginning of the end of availability of low priced food in world market. The alternative for the government is to invest more in research and modernisation of cultivation methods," he added.

Professor MA Baqui Khalily, executive director of the Institute of Microfinance, also spoke on the occasion.

son is struggling to provide for the family."

Yasmin, a young girl standing in line at BDR outlet on Salimullah Road, said she had been waiting in line since 7:00am to purchase rice.

"My mother will start cooking for our family of six members after I get home with the rice," she said adding, "It's impossible for my rickshaw puller father to buy rice at Tk 36 a kg from retail stores."

It is alleged that some people are making profits by selling the rice at higher price after purchasing it from the BDR outlets.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Food in a bid to relieve the people of the rising price of rice yesterday started direct sale of rice from trucks in different locations in the capital.

## Hasina

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be taken to the hospital tomorrow according to the recommendation of the hospital," Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told The Daily Star last night.

On whether Hasina would be hospitalised this time too, the prison deputy said, "She's physically quite OK. Her physical condition does not require her to get hospitalised."

Hasina would be whisked to the sub jail at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex following the check-up.

Meantime, the Awami League yesterday threatened to go for tougher agitation programmes across the country if the government does not release her unconditionally and send her to the US for better treatment.

Hasina, who has been behind bars for corruption allegations since July 16 last year, told the trial court Sunday that the jail authorities have been denying her fundamental human rights and produced her before court from hospital by force.

Inspector General (Prisons) Brig Gen Zakir Hassan, however, denied the news reports on the allegations Monday saying that they cannot force a person like Sheikh Hasina, a former prime minister, to appear before court.

"We took her to the court after the Square Hospitals told us that her physical condition was fine at the time," he said.

**AL'S HUNGER STRIKE**  
Meantime, acting AL President Zillur Rahman yesterday said people's patience is wearing thin day by day as the government is not responding to the call for Hasina's release as she needs treatment abroad.

The veteran leader was speaking at a hunger strike programme organised by Awami Sanchchhasebak League at the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in the city.

Awami Juba League would hold the same programme at the same venue today to press home their demand for Hasina's release.

Zillur said the time is not far away when people would take to the streets to get Hasina released, adding that the AL chief has been kept behind bars without any good grounds for ten months.

He called on the government to halt Hasina's trial and send her to the US for treatment.

## BR to install theft

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price is more than double the regular clips. However, considering the rising trend in clip theft, we are serious about installing the anti-vandal clips.

Commenting on welding the existing clips, the DG said although welding the clips could safeguard the tracks, the measure cannot be applied everywhere as it would be difficult to remove these when the tracks need repair.

Sleeper clips would be welded on the track between Banani and Cantonment stations temporarily, he added.

Responding to a query, the DG said government approval is not required to install the anti-vandal clips and these would be imported when funds are available.

Meanwhile, railway police so far recovered 160 out of the 3,510 stolen sleeper clips and arrested 14 persons in this connection.

Police suspect involvement of railway personnel in the theft. The police also blamed negligence of duty by the BR employees who were assigned to patrol the rail tracks every 12 hours.

The BR authorities formed a three-member committee to probe the sleeper clip thefts.

Engineer Abul Kashem, head of the committee, said, "We are investigating the allegation whether any railway personnel was involved in the theft and if anyone was negligent in their duties."

**SLEEPER CLIPS RECOVERY**  
Meanwhile, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Monday night recovered 251 more sleeper clips of rail tracks from a scrap shop in Tongi and arrested three people in this connection.

The arrestees are Sarwar Hossain, Sohel Miah and Badshah Miah. Rab-1 officials said acting on the information obtained from the three, the clips were recovered from the scrap shop of Kashem Sikder at Ali Commissioner Market.

Earlier, railway police arrested 14 people and recovered 160 clips from the capital's Banani and Gulshan areas.

## Bigwigs' trials linger

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trials for months.

The highest number of cases was filed against Tarique Rahman, the man who had allegedly been at the centre of the rampant corruption that had permeated every sphere of the society in the five years of the immediate past regime of BNP. Jamaat led four-party alliance government.

Although he reportedly controlled every aspect of the state and the government ranging from the civil administration to political agenda, from BNP's political office Hawa Bhagan in the capital, he is yet to face trial in any of the cases, despite being detained for over a year now.

Several other politicians however were convicted through trials while the trials of some other big fishes of politics, including detained former prime minister also AL President Sheikh Hasina, have already begun.

Sources said progress in the investigation of most of the cases filed against the political leaders is not satisfactory enough for pressing charges.

In defence of the delay in submitting charge sheets in the cases, investigation officers of a number of cases said they are overloaded with work while suffering from an acute shortage of manpower and logistics.

Trial of an extortion case of Tk 3 crore against Sheikh Hasina already had begun, the fate of which became uncertain following a High Court (HC) order declaring illegal the military backed caretaker government's decision to bring the case under EPR.

The HC ruling is currently stayed, pending the Supreme Court Appellate Division's judgement on it, since the government appealed against the ruling.

Sheikh Hasina, who was detained on July 16 last year, is facing three extortion and two graft cases filed during the regime of the present caretaker government, with only an extortion case's trial already initiated while the others have been under investigation for months.

Meanwhile, three graft cases filed against former premier also BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who was detained on September 3 of last year immediately after the Gato scam case had been filed against her, have yet to make any headway towards trials.

The investigation officers could not press charges in the Gato scam case in the last eight months while two other graft cases in connection with Niko and Baropukuria coal mine scams are also still under investigation.

The investigation report in the Niko graft case against Khaleda and four others was submitted to the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) on March 13, with a proposal for indicting nine more persons.

Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami, its Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mojaheed, and BNP leaders M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar, and M Shamsul Islam are also facing graft charges in connection with the case of Baropukuria coal mine scam filed by the ACC on February 26 this year. But they have not been detained, for reasons yet unknown.

Khaleda Zia, her sons Tarique and Koko, and Obaidul Quader were arrested by the trial forces immediately after filing of graft and extortion cases against them, while some others were also detained without specific charges.

AL Secretary General Abdul Jalil had been detained on May 28 of last year and kept in custody without any specific charge, until he was allowed to go abroad for treatment last month.

Only when the HC declared his detention illegal, the ACC filed a case against him on December 18 of last year in connection with concealing information in his wealth statement submitted to the com-

mission, till now the investigation of which has not even produced an indictment.

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed, detained on April 13 last year, is facing two cases, one for possessing alcoholic liquor illegally, the proceedings of which was stayed by the HC, and another for graft, which is still under investigation.

Former health minister also BNP Standing Committee Member Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who was detained on March 7 last year, is facing a number of cases in connection with extortion and graft, trials of which are also yet to begin.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, who was detained on March 8 last year, is facing as many as ten extortion cases, one graft case, and a swindling case.

In last April police pressed charges against Tarique in a case for extorting Tk 1 crore, which was the first to be filed against him. But the HC stayed the indictment, and the case is now pending while the government has made no move to overturn the stay order.

All other cases against Tarique, who was sarcastically called the 'prince' by people quashed under the bulldozer of rampant corruption and thuggery during BNP-Jamaat rule, have been under investigation for months now.

Three extortion cases involving several crores of taka were filed with Dhamondipolice station on April 1, 3 and 19 of last year against Tarique, who was shown arrested in one of the cases on April 23.

Gaisuddin Al Mamun, a close friend and business partner of Tarique, gave confessional statements in the cases implicating his friend, in the same month those were filed.

Another three extortion cases were filed with Gulshan police station against Tarique, in which he was shown arrested on March 29, April 23, and on May 14. Mamun also gave confessional statements implicating his friend in those cases on April 5 and 16, and on May 10.

In another extortion case of Tk 10.30 crore filed with Shahbagh police station on April 9 against Tarique, again Mamun implicated his friend in a confessional statement given on April 23.

In a case filed against Tarique with Kafur police station, he was shown arrested on April 13, in which also Mamun gave a confessional statement implicating his friend on April 19.

All of those cases were brought under EPR soon after filing.

In a latest development, the ACC on Monday pressed charges against Tarique, his wife Dr Zobaida Rahman and mother-in-law Iqbalmand Banu for amassing wealth illegally and concealing wealth information.

The ACC filed the graft case on September 26 last year with Kafur Police Station. Now the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, which received the charge sheets against them, will transfer the case to the special court for framing charges to begin the trial.

Harris Chowdhury, former political secretary to a prime minister, however was sentenced to various terms of imprisonment in absentia. On five separate charges, he was sentenced to 59 years of jail term in November of last year for swindling, corruption, and abuse of power.

Harris, also a joint secretary of BNP, was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in last May for not submitting his wealth statement to the ACC. In October, he was sentenced to three years in jail for illegally possessing foreign currencies.

Another political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, Moadad Ali Falu, who was arrested on February 5 of last year, has not yet been convicted for any offence, despite having allegations

of illegally amassing a huge amount of wealth in the past few years.

Falu, who was elected as a BNP lawmaker through a controversial by-election in Dhaka-10 constituency, is facing four cases --- three for misappropriating government relief materials, and the other for concealing information in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

He was indicted in all the cases, but trial of only one in connection with misappropriation of relief materials began recently. His wife Mahbuba Sultana however was convicted for tax evasion.

Arafat Rahman Koko, who was detained along with his mother Khaleda Zia in connection with Gato scam, is now facing two cases for graft and extortion, progress in the investigation of which has been very little.

The ACC pressed charges against Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, who was detained on February 4 last year in connection with concealing information in his wealth statement. The HC stayed the case, while the government has made no move yet to overturn the stay order.

Former minister also BNP Joint Secretary General Mirza Abbas, who was detained on February 26 last year, is facing three graft cases, a money laundering case, and a tax evasion case. Trial of the money laundering case began, and charges were framed in a graft case in connection with misappropriating and selling 18 government houses, and in the tax evasion case.

Meanwhile, his wife Afroza Abbas was convicted in two cases in connection with tax evasion.

AL Advisory Council Member Salman F Rahman, who was detained on February 4 last year, is facing 10 cases --- eight for swindling, one for money laundering, and another for graft. Some of the swindling cases were settled outside the court, while charges were pressed in the money laundering case, but the trial has yet to begin.

AL Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, who was detained on May 28 last year, is facing an extortion case as a co-accused of Hasina.

Under such circumstances, questions have been raised whether trials of the political honchos, suspected of graft and other criminal activities, will be completed in the next eight to nine months, to make it impossible for them to contest in the next parliamentary election, which is supposed to be held by the year end.

Since the caretaker government had launched anti-graft crackdown on political suspects on February 4 of last year, a large number of political leaders and businessmen were detained and cases were filed against them.

As many as 240 people, 217 of whom have been in politics, were however convicted and sentenced to jail in connection with 61 cases.

Political leaders Dr Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir, Nazmul Huda, Mohammad Nasim, Amanullah Aman, Mir Nasiruddin, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, Ali Asgar loby, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Sahjahan Siraj, Ziaul Huq Zia, Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu, Naser Rahman, Mizanur Rahman Minu, and Lutfozzaman Babar are among the convicted.

## DCC sues

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DCC's acting legal officer MS Karim filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station, accusing the firm's Managing Director and Orion Group Chairman Obaidul Karim, a scamster on the run, and four others of forgery and cheating.

The complainant said the firm did not act according to the contract with the DCC. Besides, the accused had submitted fake and forged bank documents.

Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, told The Daily Star that the case was filed at 9:00pm.

## Rab

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activities at the moment that can be a reason for worry for the people."

He added that Rab is stepping up measures in collecting information about militants and criminals and their activities.

Hasan said, "Rab has stepped into its fifth year and during the last four years the force's main achievement has been to be able to gain the faith and love of the people."

In reply to a question, Hasan said, "The number of crossfire incidents have gone down as the number of incidents of gunfight between Rab and criminals have reduced."

He said Rab has played a vital role in combating crime, stopping illegal Voip business, reducing drug peddling and reducing the projection of vulgar scenes in cinema halls.

At the meeting, Hassan pointed out that Rab has now taken steps to integrate latest technologies into its system in order to be more effective in fighting terrorism.

The Rab DG also mentioned that Rab would shortly purchase a helicopter for use in its drive against terrorism.

## Emon

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along with his gang members. The plainclothes Rab personnel came across a people carrier carrying the gang.

The gang members opened fire on the team and the Rab personnel retaliated with gunfire. The gang managed to flee leaving behind the people carrier. Later the bullet riddled body of Ponir was discovered in the vehicle along with a pistol, Rab-2 said.

According to Rab-2, they located Ponir with the help of Emon's confessions. Emon is now on remand.

Ponir started his underworld activities in 1991 starting with the killing of a man in Dhaka. He had been carrying out extortions and other criminal activities in Dhamondipolice, Hazaribagh and various other areas in the city since Emon was absent, Rab sources said.

Ponir of Shrinagar of Munshiganj was wanted in a number of criminal cases including murder and abduction cases. He was also accused in several sensational murder cases filed in connection with the killings of cable-TV businessman Rubel and Juba Dallader Shibli.

Rab-2 officials said Ponir was the main hitman of Emon's gang.

Emon was deported to Bangladesh by the Indian authorities on March 7.

## Stephen Evans

**FROM PAGE 16**  
previously served as British Ambassador to Afghanistan and British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka. He has also served as the Head of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's South Asia Department.

Stephen Evans CMG, OBE is married to Sharon Ann and has two children.

Prior to his appointment in Bangladesh, Evans served as Director of Afghanistan Information Strategy in FC0. He has also served in the British missions in Islamabad, Ankara, Bangkok and Hanoi.

## Haji Selim

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Haji Selim's case, showing 20 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrants against the couple and an order to attach their properties, as they have been absconding since the case was filed.

In the charge sheet, the IO mentioned that Selim had concealed Tk 1,04,13,936 in his wealth statement submitted earlier to the ACC. Selim's wife was accused of abetting her husband for accumulating wealth through illegal means.

ACC Assistant Director Mahabubul Alam filed the case with Lalbagh Police Station against Selim and his wife under sections 18 and 26 (1) of the ACC Act, 2004, and section 15 (Kha)/5 of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), 2007 on September 24 last year.

The complainant in the first information report (FIR) said Selim accumulated wealth worth over Tk 14.65 crore, which is disproportionate to his known sources of income. The FIR also added that Selim concealed information about his actual wealth and properties worth over Tk 8,70,39,758 in the wealth statement he submitted to the ACC.

**CASE AGAINST MOSHARRAF**  
Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani passed the order allowing ACC to interrogate Khondokar Mosharraf after ACC submitted a petition in this connection.

ACC Assistant Director Shafiq Alam filed the case with Ramna Police Station against Dr Mosharraf and his wife Bilkis Akhter for amassing Tk 12,51,06,666 and concealing Tk 3,11,38,678 in their wealth statements submitted earlier to the ACC. The case was filed on January 10.

The case was filed against them under sections 18 and 26 (1) of the ACC Act, 2004, and sections 15 (Kha)/5 of the EPR, 2007.

## 90,000 MT food

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Bagerhat districts and the rest will be distributed as part of the USAID's regular food aid programmes in the flood-prone and seasonally food insecure areas of the country, a US Embassy press release yesterday said.

It said the USAID-supported food aid programmes target the poorest of the poor who live in the most food insecure and vulnerable areas of the country.

The food aid assistance is designed to bridge the gap between disaster response and development by supporting planning and preparedness activities.

The USAID has helped build 245 multi-purpose disaster shelters, developed about 4,000 community-based disaster mitigation structures, and established a stockpile of emergency disaster kits for 30,000 families.

It provided training for local disaster committees, volunteers and schoolteachers in 271 of the country's 277 disaster-prone upazilas. The programme focuses on protection of assets by raising homesteads and building raised access roads to markets and schools.

The programme develops alternative livelihood options for the ultra-poor through activities such as poultry raising, dairy farming, and vegetable gardening. The programme also provides a safety net for the poor through food- and cash-for-work projects.

In all, programme activities are helping four million people in more than 3,000 villages. The USAID's \$167 million Food Security and Disaster Management Programme addresses disaster risk mitigation and adaptation to climate change threats over the next five years.

## War criminals

**FROM PAGE 1**  
They said the government should take initiatives to try the war criminals without delay and the UN should come forward.

The issue of trying the war criminals had been discussed in various international forums including the UN Human Rights Commission but this is the first time in 37 years since Bangladesh's independence that the government officially informed the top UN official of the demand.

Experts said the government should not limit its initiative to only informing the UN secretary general of the issue; it should ensure UN's involvement in holding the trial of the war criminals.

Deputy chief of Liberation Forces Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khandker in his reaction told The Daily Star last night that raising the issue before the UN top boss through the foreign adviser indicates the government's positive attitude towards it.

"But I think the government must take it up to the UN absolutely formally for its help as old Cambodia and other countries," said Khandker, also president of Sector Commanders Forum. He said he hopes that the UN will respond positively.

Shahriar Kabir, prominent researcher on war crimes and acting president of Ekattur Ghatok Dalai Nirmla Committee, said, "We demand trial of both Pakistani and Bangladeshi war criminals."

"We expect UN's role in trying the Pakistani war criminals but now we are more concerned about the trial of Bangladeshi war criminals," he said.

The government can form a special tribunal under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 and can seek UN expertise on how to collect documents and evidence of war crimes, he added.

The government can also request the UN to send observers to witness the trial process.

Dr MA Hasan, convener of War Crimes Facts Finding Committee, told The Daily Star that Bangladesh should seek the UN help in writing so that it cannot remain inactive regarding the issue.

"This is also an obligation of the UN to ensure the trial of war criminals as Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on Genocide 1948 (in 1998)," he added.

"The UN can help us in forming the tribunal and can send international jurists to help the enquiry commission regarding war crimes," he said.

Shaheen Reza Noor, president of Projonmo 71, an organisation of the children of martyrs of the Liberation War, told The Daily Star that the government will have to pursue the matter to ensure UN's involvement. Meanwhile, the government should take other necessary actions to start the trial.

National and international communities raised the demand for the trial of war criminals immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the initiative to try the war criminals and formulated several laws to this end, but all ended after his brutal killing in 1975.

Families and relatives of martyrs, victims of war crimes, freedom fighters, socio-political and cultural organisations, human rights bodies, leading professionals and eminent

## Purchase body

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Previously the ceiling was Tk 5 crore.

The finance division would now fix the ceiling of spending of different offices under the ministries, departments and corporations, sources said.

The meeting also approved proposed purchase of 50,000 sleepers for Bangladesh Railway and cancelled the earlier tender for setting up a waste treatment plant for tannery factories.