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People's Right to Know

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proposal for

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) yesterday turned down an adviser's proposal for unofficial talks as the party decided not to entertain any sorts of talks with the government without formal meeting proposal.

prompted AL Acting President Zillur Rahman yesterday to reject Education and Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman's proposal over telephone for holding talks with the government at 5:00pm at State Guest House Padma. The adviser made the phone call to the AL acting president at noon yester-

The AL acting president also informed the adviser of his party decision not to hold any talks with the government without a written

proposal. Earlier, on Wednesday night, AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam had conveyed the decision of the party to the commerce adviser following a meeting

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

AL says no to adviser Zillur's EC free to talk with proposal for unofficial talks Saifur group

HC discharges Khaleda's writ petition; EC may ask both factions of BNP to settle dispute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The decision of the party | The High Court (HC) yesterday the HC writbench. paved the way for Election Commission's dialogue with the Saifur-led BNP splinter group after it dismissed the petition of Khaleda Zia challenging the EC invitation to Hafiz for talks.

The HC did not make any decision as to which faction of BNP-the one led by the party's detained Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the one led by M Saifur Rahman -- is the mainstream of the party.

But the court said the EC letter inviting Maj (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed as BNP representative for the dialogue was not illegal.

The HC discharged the writ petition saying it is not maintainable since the EC dialogue does not come under any legal bindings. The dispute centring the invitation

letter is political which also does not come under the jurisdiction of

Interpreting the verdict, a few lawyers involved with the case said the EC letter to Hafiz is valid as the HC did not declare it illegal.

Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the EC might informally ask both feuding factions of BNP to settle their disputes and sit together in the dialogue.

"We will decide our strategy [regarding holding the electoral reform talks with the BNP) after we get a copy of the verdict," the CEC told reporters at the EC office.

The HC division bench comprising Justice Mirza Hossain Hyder and Justice Mamnoon Rahman also said the court in its constitutional jurisdiction cannot deal with matters involving internal disputes between

political factions.

BNP activists led by a few woman : been denied justice through this leaders chanted slogans on the ; verdict. court premises rejecting the HC: verdict and against Hafiz and : Meanwhile, Chief Election Mannan Bhuiyan, leaders of the : winning or losing. Rather, it is BNP Saifur-led BNP faction.

Police dispersed the BNP activists who also brought out a small; sweetmeats to celebrate the verdict procession in a passage of the Bar : while those gathered at Delwar's

The court in its order said accord- looked glum. ing to articles 118 and 119 of the constitution and the electoral law, : politics. Khaleda Zia is our chairdialogue with political parties.

resolved where it deviates from the : the standing committee. law, the court said, adding that : He said, "The Election according to article 102 of the Commission (EC) has rightfully SEE PAGE 15 COL 1 :

Hafiz hails, Delwar bins verdict

SECOND EDITION

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maj (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed of pro-reform BNP faction yesterday said the High Court (HC) verdict shows that he is the "lawful secretary general of the party".

On the other hand, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by Chairperson Khaleda Following the verdict, some : Zia, said the 'mainstream BNP' has

Talking to reporters at his Banani residence, Hafiz said the court's ruling former secretary general Abdul is not about any particular faction which is winner here.

Pro-Saifur faction distributed Nam flat on Manik Miah Avenue

"We all are involved in BNP there is no provision for EC's holding person, and now the High Court verdict proves I'm the lawful secre-If anything were said in the law: tary general," observed Hafiz, on this matter, the court could have : acting secretary general made by

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

BORO HARVEST

Long-term effect on rice price unlikely

INAM AHMED

As Boro harvest has started, deeper questions like whether the country's domestic price could remain disconnected from international prices and whether traditional stockists would be allowed to play their role in food security have

Economists say although the harvest could cause a temporary price disconnect, there are little chance of longer term price dampening because of the international situation. While speculations are rife about the future rice situation, global major crop season is still eight months away and wheat news is bad.

Already Bangladesh rice price is disconnected from the international market where price is much higher; further and deeper disconnect will lead to a messy domestic market situation.

Meantime, the government is

now faced with a challenge of giving a huge subsidy on rice for open market sale, fuel and fertiliser, and quick creation of employment because ultimately people's income has to adjust to the higher price regime that is expected to prevail for unforeseeable future.

All this poses a longer term macroeconomic management challenge for Bangladesh -- it has to target inflation with monetary and fiscal policies and exchange rate management.

Already the economy has a few comfort zones that the country should carefully manage to get the best output, but there are also some strains and paradoxes that it should address soon.

Look at the economic situation first. The external sector is witnessing an upsurge in the last three months with a highest of 52 percent increase in year-on-year exports in January. This helped swing the negative growth in exports to 9

percent growth in the first seven months of this fiscal year. With orders pouring in, a double-digit export growth is once again expected when the year ends three months from now in June.

"Even when the US economy is under duress and consumer spending there has shrunk, our basic garment exports will retain its steam because consumers will shift to lower-end products," said Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "With a healthy EU economy and taka-euro exchange rate competitive, our exports to Europe will also march ahead."

Analysis now show that GSP utilisation rate, which was in the ratio of 20:80 for knit and woven products, has shifted to 50:50. This means generation of more local employment and value addition as well as more retention of foreign exchange.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Release Hasina, Khaleda before dialogue: Jamaat

Advisers talk to party leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday asked the government to release former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina on bail so that they can take part in the proposed

dialogue with the government. At an unofficial pre-dialogue meeting with four advisers to the government, Jamaat also said that they are in favour of holding the national election before local government elections.

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Makbul SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Court stays Duta polls indefinitely

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday stayed for an indefinite period the election of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) scheduled for April 12.

The stay order came following a civil suit filed by a DU student seeking an injunction on the elec-

Judge Sheikh Merina Sultana of the 10th Assistant Judge's Court imposed an interim injunction on the Duta election and directed six respondents not to go for it until further order from the court.



Activists of Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee torch a motorbike of a law enforcement agency near Baitul Mukarram National Mosque during clashes with police yesterday.

Bigots fight fiercely with cops to protest women policy 50 including 10 policemen injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The surrounding areas of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque turned into a battlefield yesterday organisation clashed with police leaving over 50 injured including 10 shells.

policemen and 15 pedestrians. Witnesses said the hour-long clash started around 2:15pm when police resisted about 500 activists of Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee attempting to march towards the office of the chief adviser in a procession after holding a rally on the mosque premises.

Khelafat Majlish and Islami Shashontantra Andolan recently formed the Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee to protest against the National Women Development Policy approved by the advisers' council recently.

"As police halted their progress, the agitating activists started pelting them with brickbats and broke through the police ring," said pedestrian Mostofa Kamal who took shelter near the mosque during the clash. Fifteen pedestrians including

two children Shaon, 12, and Badhon, 9, were injured. Employees of nearby shop

Mithu Carpets said, "When police locked the gate at the north side,

the activists came through other gates and attacked police with bamboo sticks and brickbats."

At one stage, police resorted to charging truncheons and firing when members of an Islamic teargas canisters to disperse them. Police used around 10 teargas

During the clash, the activists set fire to two motorbikes of law enforcers and damaged over 10 vehicles including two sports utility vehicles of the Islamic Foundation and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Chases and counter chases took place between the police and the

Other witnesses said all business establishments were closed for three hours due to repeated attacks of the activists.

The injured activists and pedestrians received treatment from Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Suhrawardy Hospital and different clinics in the area while the policemen were treated at Rajarbagh Police Hospital.

Farid Uddin Ahmed, officer-incharge (OC) of Paltan Police Station, told The Daily Star, "The unruly attackers injured several policemen, including Assistant Commissioner [AC] Pankaj Roy."

He said they would take legal SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Food crisis has no link with nature of govt, says CA

OMS daily allocation raised by 200 MT in Dhaka, industrial zones

UNB, Narayanganj

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the question of political or non-political government has nothing to do with the current food situation in the country as temporary food shortages were seen in the past under elected governments at home and abroad.

Striking an optimistic note, Fakhruddin said the difficulties the country is now going through for food-price hike will be over soon if all, including political parties, professionals and business community, work unitedly.

The chief adviser was talking to reporters in Narayanganj after visiting some Open Market Sale (OMS) outlets in the district.

His observation on the nature of a government came as the press asked him whether a political government could better control the high prices of commodities

now gripping the country. Meantime, the government yesterday decided to increase the daily allocation of rice for Open Market Sale (OMS) programme in the capital and industrial pockets in Narayanganj by 200 tonnes.

The chief adviser noted that many countries in the world had witnessed food shortages in the past even when elected governments were in power.

Fakhruddin said he came to Narayanganj to see for himself how the dealers are selling rice and other essentials at subsidised prices there. He said he identified two things at the OMS outlets: inadequate

supply of rice and lack of manage-

ment efficiency. He said the gov-

ernment would soon address the

problem. He said as was the case last month, the amount of OMS rice SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

TRAIN SERVICE Dhaka signs supplementary deal with Delhi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Indian officials signed a supplementary deal in Dhaka yesterday for resumption of passenger train service between Dhaka and Kolkata from Pahela Baishakh, 43 years after the service

was snapped. Communications Secretary Dr Mahbubur Rahman and Indian High Commissioner Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty signed the deal on behalf of their respective governments at the communications

ministry in the afternoon. The deal allows running of passenger trains between Cantonment Station in Dhaka and Chitpur Station in Kolkata through the Darshana border for a period of three years, after which the deal has to be renewed if both sides want to continue with the service.

The contract gives them power to scrap it in three months' notice, officials said. Terming the occasion "historic,"

the communications secretary and the Indian high commissioner hoped the cross-border "Moitree Express" service would not only SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

UNDP boss set to quit before time for staff's no confidence

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

UNDP Country Director Manoj Basnyat is on his way out under controversial circumstances nearly two years before schedule.

His departure comes hot on the heels of a vote of no confidence in him by his staff in a recent survey and several unofficial government complaints about his interference in development projects.

The UNDP Global Staff Survey 2007 for Bangladesh obtained by The Daily Star shows that 86 percent of international staff and 62 percent of local staff at UNDP Bangladesh had no confidence in their country director.

The survey also shows that 57 percent international staff and 30 percent local staff at UNDP offices here feel that procurement is not done transparently at their offices while 71 percent international staff and 52 percent local staff said recruitment was also not done in accordance with the UNDP rules and regulations. Both the government and the

UN, however, officially denied that

Basnyat's departure is due to government pressure or the "survey fallout" within the UNDP. UN Resident Coordinator

Renata Lok Dessallien told The Daily Star last night that Manoj is "simply being posted somewhere else because he is needed there" Basnyat could not be contacted for his comments. Manoj Basnyat, who is currently

on a three-week leave, came to take up the newly created post of country director of Bangladesh for United Nations Development Programme in December 2006. Usually, a UN permanent staff is

assigned to a post for minimum three years, which can be extended to five years. Sources said Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury "informally

discussed" the change of country

director with Desallien during a

But Desallien said the issue has never been discussed during any meeting with government officials. A UNDP spokesperson told The Daily Star that the high disapproval

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

meeting Monday morning.

Govt targets procurement of 30 lakh MT food grains

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid poor procurement of food grains in the current fiscal year, the government has set a target of procuring 30 lakh tonnes of food | Detained Awami League (AL) grains in the next fiscal year for building a safe food stock.

"We will procure major portion of the targeted food grains in the next Boro season," Food Secretary Mollah Waheduzzaman told press briefing yesterday.

The briefing was held to describe government efforts to rein in spiralling food prices while economists blamed it for not taking pre-emptive measures for creating a safe stock.

The government had a target of procuring 14 lakh tonnes of food grains from domestic sources this fiscal year. This included 12 lakh tonnes of Boro, one lakh tonne Aman and one lakh tonne wheat, the food secretary said.

Besides, the government had targeted import of eight lakh tonnes of food grains-- 4.5 lakh tonnes of rice and 3.5 lakh tonnes of wheat.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

POWER PLANT CASE

'Farcical trial' to bar her from polls Alleges Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that the present government is out to have her convicted in a 'farcical trial' to bar her from the next general election.

She made the remark to her counsel shortly after the Special Court-1 had adjourned till April 15 the hearing on charge framing in the barge-mounted power plant graft case against her.

"They want to see me punished in any way so that I cannot take part in the election. But I have faith in people," she was quoted as saying by her Personal Secretary Dr Hasan Mahmud.

Talking about the present food crisis, she said 2.47 crore metric tons of rice and 82 lakh metric tons of wheat were produced during her tenure as the prime minister. Her government had turned Bangladesh into a country of food surpluses, she added.

"But nowadays, it is potato



mocking reference to the call for increasing potato consumption to take some pressure off rice. She said she is standing trial for

founding Bangabandhu Memorial Trust and helping deprived people, but those who had siphoned thousands of crores of taka out of the country have yet to be brought to book.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4