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## NIKO GRAFT CASE Khaleda not taken to court for illness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The jail authorities did not produce detained BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia before a special court for the hearing on charge framing in the Niko corruption case yesterday.

State counsel Mosharraf Hossain Kaja told newsmen that Khaleda was not produced before the court due to her illness. However, counsels for Khaleda claimed the jail authorities gave no reason for failing to produce her before the court.

"We know she [Khaleda] is doing fine. The proceedings of the case cannot go on without her presence. The government did not notify the court as to why she was not produced before the judge," said advocate Sanaullah Miah, a defence lawyer.

He said the proceeding of a case cannot go on, after it has been taken into cognisance, without the

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## Hasina's charge hearing in Niko case deferred till June 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday deferred the hearing on charge framing against former premier Sheikh Hasina and eight others in the Niko graft case to June 1.

Meanwhile, the cross-examination in the barge-mounted power plant graft case against Hasina and seven others continued yesterday for the fourth day with the defence asking the plaintiff whether he filed the case to undermine her politically.

Judge Amar Kumar Roy of the Special Court-2, set up on the Jatia Sangsad Bhaban premises, fixed the date for next hearing following prayer by the defence. The defence told the judge they would not be

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## MEETING WITH GRASSROOTS LEADERS AL for movement to free Hasina

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

The grassroots level leaders of Awami League (AL) yesterday said the party must not participate in the talks with the government or parliamentary polls without its detained President Sheikh Hasina.

Speaking at an extended meeting in the city, they also called on the AL policymakers to announce tougher agitation programmes including hartal and blockade to press home the six-point demand.

The AL high-command, on the other hand, directed its national and district-level leaders to prepare for an all-out movement to force the government to meet the demands.

The six-point demand unveiled at the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meeting on May 14 includes release of Hasina, withdrawal of the state of emergency, schedule for the election, measures to end price spiral of essentials, trial of war criminals and the state recognition of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the father of the nation.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina in a message to the delegates late last night said she wants election and handover of power to people's representatives without delay. She sought to alert her party colleagues to the prospect of "conspiracy to foil the election".

Acting general secretary Syed

Ashrafur Islam read out the message that insiders said was sent through lawyers.

Earlier in the day, acting AL president Zillur Rahman in his speech said, "I declare from this podium that taking people with us we will make the government concede our demands."

"However, you will have to be ready for whatever comes along—movement or election."

Urging all to unite in efforts to free Hasina the way Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was freed through a mass uprising in 1969.

The AL extended meeting, the largest event by a political party since the state of emergency was

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## Lenient treatment might create imbalance in justice system

Legal experts say about  
truth commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Legal experts and rights activists yesterday said dealing with corruptionists 'leniently' through setting up the Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC) might create an imbalance in the country's justice system and damage the spirit of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign.

By giving some corrupt people an opportunity to avoid imprisonment by confessing before the commission and surrendering their ill-gotten wealth to the state exchequer, the government is breaking away from the existing legal system which has the provisions for both jailing and fining for the crime, some experts noted.

The prevailing situation in the country is not so grievous or warlike that it requires showing mercy

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## Most politicians see duality in anti-graft policy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most of the political parties have strongly criticised the government move to set up Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC), saying that it will create a dual system in curbing corruption.

In their reaction yesterday, the political leaders also demanded that the government scrap the plan for establishing the commission.

Talking to The Daily Star, Awami League (AL) president member Suranjit Sengupta said that the decision to set up such a commission should have been taken earlier.

"Formation of the Truth and Accountability Commission so late would benefit neither the corrupt nor the politicians," Suranjit said.

The former lawmaker also termed the TAC "Truth less

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A ragpicker collects pieces of paper floating on water at Kakrail in the city after a few hours of downpour inundated the street.

PHOTO: STAR

## PHULBARI COALMINE

# Govt warned of slide in law, order situation

Advised to suspend Asia Energy activities

SHARIEF KHAN

An intelligence agency in a special report has suggested that the government temporarily suspend all direct or indirect activities of Asia Energy to avert severe deterioration in law and order around Phulbari coalmine.

In a report to the energy ministry, the home ministry has referred to a special report of the intelligence agency saying that in order to avoid such a situation, the government must formulate a policy on Phulbari coalmine that is acceptable to all considering national and local interest and on the basis of open discussion at national level.

The report also suggested that the government should motivate all local people in favour of the coalmine.

Sources say the energy ministry on May 15 reviewed the report and

observed that Asia Energy has not been given any lease to develop Phulbari mine and the government has not taken any decision on open cut or underground mining.

Decisions on these matters may be taken after the draft coal policy is finalised.

The process to frame the coal policy was initiated by the energy ministry since August 2005. This process slowed down apparently due to disputes surrounding the proposed Phulbari coalmine and Asia Energy.

The ministry also felt that the Bureau of Mineral Development (BMD) should ask Asia Energy to refrain from all activities under its own name or other names.

Later, the ministry decided not to say anything to Asia Energy.

Asia Energy's activities in Phulbari came to a halt following violent protests, in which six people were killed in August 2006.

The protests were organised by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port. The key factor of the protests included fear of displacement of more than 200,000 people and losing huge arable land.

After the Phulbari protests, the government officially did not say anything to Asia Energy, while the British company routinely filed applications enquiring about the status of its proposal for the mine.

On March 7, 2007, the BMD wrote to Asia Energy for the first time saying the company would have to wait till the coal policy is finalised. The BMD sent a second letter on November 5 reiterating the same position.

Though Asia Energy made a visible presence in 2002, it did not draw national attention till it submitted a feasibility study and a scheme of development in 2005.

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## TALKS WITH CPB, LDP Top down pressure won't lead to political reform

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On the third day of the ongoing pre-poll dialogues between political parties and the government yesterday, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) told the latter that reforming the country's body politic will not be possible through ad hoc measures and top down pressure.

In another parley of the day, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Col (ret) Oli Ahmed said the caretaker government should

not waste time over amending the constitution and rather should pay attention to holding a free and fair general election.

CPB also called for decentralisation of state power rather than redistribution of presidential and prime ministerial powers, and warned at the same time that formation of the Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC) 'might end up being a political compromise bailing out big fishes of corruption'.

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## Rejoinder, our reply

North Korean company Namnam in a rejoinder to a report headlined "Miner now wants refund of non-existent loans" published in The Daily Star on May 16 differed on a number of issues.

About the Supplier's Credit loan being "non-existent", Namnam said the investment was verified and identified by Petrobangla and Maddhapara mine consultant Kopek.

The rejoinder said Petrobangla's investment committee officially recognised that the Namnam investment was materialised at 90 percent of contract price as of October, 2005 in its Investment Report signed by tripartite authorities, which was confirmed by an independent accountant and auditing firm. Afterwards, Namnam pumped its investment for substantial comple

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## Tk 622cr agriculture research to up farm output launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday launched a Tk 622 crore project to revitalise agricultural research and extension for increasing farm production to ensure food security of the country.

Under the project titled National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP): Phase-1, Tk 258.63 crore has been allocated for research and Tk 251.09 crore for extension services. And the rest is for building an effective marketing system for farm products, project preparation and coordination.

Of the amount, the World Bank

(WB) will provide around Tk 438 crore, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Tk 135 crore and Bangladesh government Tk 48 crore.

The NATP in its five-year first phase will cover farmers in 1,200 unions of 120 upazilas.

Agriculture Adviser CS Karim said the government expects that implementation of the NATP would raise production of crops, fishes and livestock by 10 percent, and increase farmers' income by 20 percent.

Speaking at the launching workshop of 'NATP: Phase-I' at

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## Delwar receives green signal from Khaleda to join dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain received green signal from detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to participate in the ongoing dialogues with the caretaker government.

Sources close to Delwar said the BNP chairperson approved the proposal of BNP leader Brig Gen

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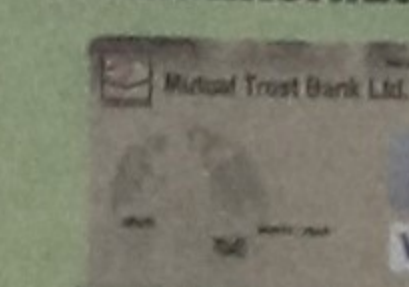
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