

Govt reviews EPR to ease bail

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and SHAMIM ASHRAF

The government has initiated a move to relax some major provisions of the emergency power rules (EPR), especially the ones concerning bail in corruption cases.

After rounds of discussions with anti-corruption watchdogs over the last few weeks, it yesterday formed an experts' committee to review in particular section 15 that deals with graft-related charges.

The amended emergency rules would benefit many of around 200 high profile corruption suspects, observed officials involved in the anti-corruption drive.

These are stringent laws with restrictions on bail, and many of them are interlinked in a way that if one provides some room, others block that, said sources in the government and anti-corruption watchdogs.

According to some sections, a government sanction is needed for emergency rules to hold good in some cases. But there are sections according to which certain cases come under the EPR automatically.

For instance, sources said,

section 15 relates to all corruption cases and no permission from the government is needed as it provides for automatic application of the EPR to graft cases.

Interestingly, many public administration and anti-graft body officials were not fully aware of the provision for automatic application till May 8 when charges were pressed against 24 people including ex-premier Khaleda Zia, her son Arafat Rahman Koko and eight former ministers in the much-talked about Gato graft case.

As it was not mentioned in the charge sheet that the EPR would be applicable, many accused expected that they would get bail in the case.

But the charge-sheeted accused who surrendered or were arrested were sent to jail later. Some others were refused anticipatory bail by the High Court.

The accused ministers from BNP are M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and AKM Mosharrif Hossain while from Jamaat-e-Islami is its ameer Motiur

Rahman Nizami.

After automatic application became an issue of discussion, the ACC asked its senior counsel ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul about implications of the section.

"I informed the commission that no government sanction is required to bring any corruption case under the emergency power rules since they apply automatically," Mukul told reporters.

After that, a process was initiated to relax the rules and yesterday's formation of the committee was a sequel to that.

Coming out of the meeting at the law ministry where the review committee was formed, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said, "We have discussed the emergency power rules in efforts to strengthen the environment of confidence. As you know, the curbs on indoor politics have already been relaxed. We meet today to identify specifically what else can be done in this regard."

Talking about the committee's work, he said, "There are some practical dimensions here. Those who are experts, like the secretary and lawyers, would know these

better. The law adviser is leading all these."

Law Adviser AF Hassan Ariff, Home Adviser MA Matin, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, acting ACC chairman Habibur Rahman and ACC Commissioner Monjur Mannan attended the meeting.

The move comes hard on the heels of temporary release of Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and the process to release Khaleda Zia, another former prime minister, and her two sons. It has given rise to questions whether the government is now trying to provide some relief for high profile detainees.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, ACC Director General (admin) Col Hanif Iqbal sought to brush aside such possibility. He said, "The initiative to review the emergency rules has been taken to give some relief to the accused irrespective of their identity."

The government did not have to relax the EPR to release AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil and AL chief Sheikh Hasina on parole. This move has been taken for the benefit

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Anti-terrorism Ordinance '08 promulgated

UNB, Dhaka

The president has promulgated the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance 2008 providing death penalty for offences like terror financing and staging murder to create panic and jeopardise country's sovereignty.

The ordinance came into effect from Wednesday through a gazette notification.

Special Tribunal will be constituted to deal with such offences, which are non-bailable.

If anyone resorts to murder,

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4-party questions procedure of Hasina's release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led four-party alliance yesterday criticised the government and the Awami League (AL) for cutting "backdoor deals" to release AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

Hinting at both the government and the AL, the alliance leaders said they would have to follow the "enlightened path" because such deals will not serve the purpose in the long run.

Following a meeting of the alliance leaders at his Nam flat, BNP Secretary General Khandaker

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Hasina departs, urges party unity for polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed party men to remain united at any cost and strengthen the organisation for the upcoming parliamentary polls.

The former premier, who was released temporarily on Wednesday, also said she would return to the country as soon as her treatment in the USA completes.

Hasina left Dhaka on a British Airways flight at about 8:25am yesterday.

"She [Hasina] has directed us to work together in a well organised manner for the next parliamentary election," AL acting President Zillur Rahman told The Daily Star after seeing Hasina off at the Zia International Airport (ZIA).

Zillur, however, said no discussion was held with the party president regarding taking part in the election.

"She urged all to maintain party unity at any cost and remain alert so that the party is not harmed or split. She also directed us to maintain strict discipline within the party," he told reporters at ZIA.

Zillur, a senior AL Presidium member who has been working as

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PHOTO: STAR

Sheikh Hasina leaves Sudha Sadan in Dhanmondi for the airport early yesterday morning.

Govt to make quick decision on Khaleda, sons' release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government advisers yesterday said they will not waste time while making decisions about the release of detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia and her two sons after taking the "crucial step forward" to release Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina.

"We are coordinating everything,

There is no scope to waste time. Highest efforts are being made," Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman told reporters about the release of Khaleda and her sons.

Zillur said the government is considering the legal and humanitarian aspects before making any decision regarding the release of Khaleda and her two sons.

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Khaleda wants her sons to be sent abroad

Says she wishes to stay home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reiterating her wish to stay in the country, detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday asked the government to send her two detained sons abroad for treatment without delay.

Speaking to reporters after hearing proceedings in Niko graft case, she said, "I have told you before that I'm not going anywhere. I have been in the country and will continue to

be here. The condition of my sons however is very bad, and I ask the government to send them abroad without wasting time."

Khaleda, also former prime minister, was produced before the Special Court-9 on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises at 10:10am amid tight security.

She said, "The government must create an atmosphere of trust to ensure that all political parties

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8 bandits beaten to death in Natore

One shot dead during Rab-robber gunfight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, from Natore

Villagers beat eight robbers to death while another was shot dead during a gun battle with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel at Bias Adimpur of Shingra upazila in Natore early yesterday.

All nine of them were in their 20's and seven of them were identified. They are: Al Amin of Bias, Yunus of Durgapur, Helal of Sukash in Shingra upazila, Saiful and Vaina of Paota village, Yadul of Langolmara and Abdul Barik of Dighoria in Tarash upazila of Sirajganj.

Rab quoting locals said the gang was engaged in criminal activities including robberies and killings.

The incident occurred around 1:30am when the gang of at least 13 gathered on Adimpur Primary School ground prior to launching an attack on the village, 90km from divisional headquarters of Rajshahi.

But more than 100 villagers were lying in wait for them around the field with the gang oblivious, witnesses said. The villagers chased the gang and a few of them managed to flee while most jumped

into a pond, finding no escape route, on the northern part of the school compound.

The villagers encircled the pond as announcements were made through loudspeakers of mosques alerting other villagers about the criminals.

The gang opened fire on the villagers in a bid to scare their way out of the situation. Rab personnel tried to negotiate their surrender but the criminals kept on firing forcing Rab to retaliate, said officials of Rab and police present on the scene requesting anonymity.

The criminals later ran out of ammunition and the law enforcers asked villagers to get the criminals out of the pond, witnesses claimed.

The villagers got them out of the pond, took them to the school ground and gave them a mass beating. Six of them died on the spot and the law enforcers were able to rescue two of them but they died on their way to Singra Health Complex 35km away.

The body of the other criminal was found in the pond with a bullet wound in the head.

Two locally-made guns and three bullet shells were recovered

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Khoka denies link with 'reformists'

UNB, Dhaka

President of the dissolved Dhaka city BNP committee Sadeque Hossain Khoka yesterday denied his involvement with the party 'reformists'.

Talking to the news agency from his Birdem Hospital bed, Khoka said he has unflinching trust in party Chairperson Khaleda Zia and never thought of doing BNP politics minus Khaleda.

"Rather, I always protested and disdained whenever the question

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Nazmul Huda gets 12yrs

Wife Sigma acquitted in extortion case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced former communications minister barrister Nazmul Huda to 12 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) and acquitted his wife advocate Sigma Huda on all charges in an extortion case.

Meantime, Beximco Holdings Ltd chairman Sohel F Rahman, vice chairman Salman F Rahman, former managing director of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd CM Koyes Sami and seven other people were



Nazmul Huda

cleared of Tk 191.39 crore misappropriation charges.

Judge Mohammad Abu Mohsin at the Fifth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court returned the verdict in presence of the Huda couple, saying charges against Nazmul were proved beyond doubt.

The court also fined him Tk 50,000, defaulting on which will carry another six months in jail.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence had completed their

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