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ILLEGAL WEALTH Arrest warrant against Khoka HC grants him bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued an arrest warrant against Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in a case filed against him for amassing wealth worth Tk 9.76 crore illegally and giving false information to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). However, the High Court (HC) granted him anticipatory bail in the case and stayed the proceedings until July 16 following a writ petition for quashing the case.

LOWER COURT PROCEEDINGS
After scrutinising the case docket and other relevant documents, Senior Special Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court accepted the charge sheet and passed the order at 2:00pm.

The court also rejected the petition submitted by Khoka's wife Ishmat Ara for further investigation into the allegations since, according to her, the charge sheet was defective.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Bashundhara chairman jailed for keeping illegal currency

Wife, sons also convicted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam, his wife and three sons to two years' rigorous imprisonment for illegally keeping local and foreign currencies amounting to Tk 23 lakh at their residence.

The other convicted are Shah Alam's wife Afroza Begum, sons Sadad Sobhan Tanvir, Sayem Sobhan Anvir and Sapoyan Sobhan Tachvir.

Judge Mohammad Abul Bashar of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court also fined them Tk 10,000

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Nobel Committee chief arrives on July 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Norwegian Nobel Committee Chairman Prof Ole Danbolt Mjos and Nobel Peace Center Director Bente Erichsen will arrive in Dhaka on July 15 for the inauguration of the Exhibition on Nobel Peace Prize in Bangladesh.

Dr. Picture Library in collaboration with the Grameen Bank has organised the exhibition titled 'Jobra to Oslo' starting on July 17 at the initiative of the Nobel Peace Center and the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed will inaugurate the exhibition as the chief guest at the Grameen Bank headquarters in the capital.

Prof Ole Danbolt Mjos, who expressed his interest to visit Bangladesh during the prize celebrations in 2006, will attend the opening as the guest of honour, while Bente Erichsen will be present

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

HC stays proceedings of 2 cases against Hasina for 2 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed for two months all proceedings of the Niko and barge-mounted power plant cases filed against former premier Sheikh Hasina by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The HC bench of Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Mashuque Hosain Ahmed also issued separate rules asking the government and ACC to explain within four weeks why the cases should not be quashed.

The orders came upon two petitions filed by Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, who is now abroad for treatment following release on eight-week parole.

Her lawyers barrister Rafique-ul

Khaleda can be released the way Hasina freed

CA tells Bangladeshi community in KL

UNB, Kuala Lumpur

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said his government is ready to extend to detained former premier Khaleda Zia the same gesture shown to another expremier Sheikh Hasina through her interim release for treatment abroad.

"Sheikh Hasina was released through a legal process for her treatment abroad and the government has issued notification in this regard. If she (Khaleda) desires, same gesture will be extended to her -- there is no hesitation about it," he said at a meeting with Bangladeshi community in the ballroom of Hotel Renaissance in Kuala Lumpur.

The chief adviser made the remarks responding to a question as to why the government is not freeing Khaleda Zia the way Sheikh

Hasina was released.

He said the government wants that competent persons get elected through participation of all parties in the general election. The caretaker government is not a competitor to anyone.

He said there is no room for confusion about holding of the general election before the end of December this year, and the government has extended its all-out support to the Election Commission to do that.

"The main objective of the government is to hold a free, fair and acceptable election and transfer power to an elected government," he told the audience.

During the question-answer session, the expatriate Bangladeshis including university teachers, asked him about the general election, tenure of the caretaker government, registering

expatriates as voters, anti-corruption drives and problems of the expatriate workers.

Commenting on the tenure of the caretaker government, Fakhruddin said they took oath under the constitutional provision of the caretaker government. "We don't want to make the caretaker government controversial," he said.

The chief adviser said election rules, which are being prepared, will be finalised in a few weeks. If voters and candidates abide by the rules, it will certainly be possible to hold a credible election and elect honest and competent candidates, he said.

Fakhruddin said only a few months are left before the elections and an elected government will run the country. The process of holding the local-body elections has

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Aziz clarifies his comments on price hike

Blames media for 'distortion'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday said his Sunday's comment on price hike drawing a line between present times and Shayesta Khan's was not properly reported in the media, distorting the meaning.

He was talking to reporters after an inter-ministerial meeting at his ministry.

"I cracked a joke to explain that economic analysis must be contextual. At the time I also mentioned recent situations at home, in neighbouring countries and in the international market to explain the price hike," the adviser said.

"If what I say is not properly published, it'd give a distorted meaning," he said.

On measures against the price spike, Mirza Aziz said, "We have tried our level best to reduce the prices of essentials. We took three-fold

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Govt blasé as commodity prices skyrocket

Consumers worry ahead of Ramadan

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

While prices of essential commodities are spinning out of reach of the people since prices of fuel oils were hiked a week ago, government efforts to monitor the market or curb the prices are yet to be discernible.

The government does not even have a short-term plan to contain the prices, let alone a long-term strategy, while the prices have already gone beyond the low and fixed income group people's affordability.

Meanwhile, both the people and government officials fear further rise in prices of essentials ahead of the month of Ramadan beginning in early September.

The prices have been worrisome for us. We are searching for an immediate solution," Food and Disaster Management Adviser AMM Shawkat Ali told The Daily

Star in his office yesterday.

"I am discussing the matter with the finance adviser regularly and hopeful of finding a way out," he tried to reassure.

Officials at the commerce, and food and disaster management ministries pointed accusing fingers at the global market situation as well as some local reasons for the astronomical rise in food prices, but none of them could shed any light of hope on an expected timeframe for stabilising of the prices, if not a curbing of them.

"We are planning to hold a meeting with traders some time next week to dig out the reasons behind the price hikes," Commerce Secretary Feroz Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

Citing international and local reasons for the upward trend of prices of essentials, he said increasing production of food grains and ensuring food security could be a

solution to the problem.

"In the age of free market economy when prices are going up globally, Bangladesh can't remain out of the influence," he pointed out, admitting that middle and low income group people as well as the ultra poor are the hardest hit.

Two government committees, functioning under the commerce ministry, failed to play any effective role in taming the wild horses of price hike. One of the committees led by the additional secretary to the ministry last met on June 19, only to review the market situation.

The other high powered inter-ministerial committee headed by the commerce adviser met on June 26. The meeting however had to be cut short as Adviser Hossain Zillur, who is also in charge of the education ministry, was in a hurry for publication of the HSC results.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



Dhaka Power Distribution Company digs a trench on Mirpur Road at Kalyanpur to work on a power cable ignoring the chief adviser's July 2 directive to stop road digging in the rainy season.

Highway bus collision kills 21 in Comilla

STAR REPORT

At least 21 people were killed and 24 injured as two passenger buses collided head-on on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in Daudkandi, Comilla yesterday morning.

Witnesses said a Dhaka-bound bus of Starline Express from Feni collided head-on with a Comilla-bound bus from Homna in Daulatpur around 9:15am, reports a correspondent from Comilla.

Eighteen passengers including three women of Starline died on the spot as the bus fell into a roadside ditch due to the impact. The

driver and helper of the other bus were also killed, but their identity could not be known immediately.

Firefighters and police from Comilla and forces from highway police rushed to the spot and pulled the bus from the ditch.

"Several passengers were trapped inside the bus with their hands and legs broken," said a witness on the spot.

The injured were immediately taken to different hospitals and clinics in Comilla and Feni.

The critically injured were later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. They are Samia, 6,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Khaleda's new formula for local govt polls

Asks CG to hold JS elections first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Repeating her demand for the parliamentary election first, detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday proposed that the caretaker administration set a timeline for the next government to hold local body polls.

"If they are concerned about local government polls under an elected government they can set a month's time for it to hold the elections," she observed.

The former prime minister was

speaking to reporters after hearing proceedings in the Niko graft case against her at a special court.

She said the national election is more urgent than local polls and so the government should hold it first in compliance with the constitution.

"There has already been much delay. The parliamentary polls were supposed to be held in January 2007, but now they are planned to be held in December 2008," she continued.

Khaleda alleged the government

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

CITY POLLS 1,149 declared valid candidates

UNB, Dhaka

The nomination papers of 1,149 candidates out of 1,191 were declared valid yesterday, the last day of scrutiny for election to four city corporations.

Of the candidates, 62 are vying for mayoral post while 193 for the post of reserved-seat councillor and 894 for general councillor.

Besides, out of 657 nomination papers 545 have been declared valid for election to nine municipalities.

Of the candidates, 68 are vying for mayoral post while 359 for the post of general councillor and 118 for the post of reserved councillor.

The last date for withdrawing candidacy is July 13 and elections to the four city corporations and nine municipalities will be held on August 4.

CITY, MUNICIPALITY ELECTIONS EC worried as 'criminals' pass through scrutiny

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The sweeping electoral reforms brought by the Election Commission (EC) in an effort to have honest and competent candidates in elections, seem to have hit a major stumbling block as many 'qualified candidates' for the August 4 city corporation and municipality polls are accused in criminal cases.

Being aware of the situation, the EC yesterday at a meeting expressed its unhappiness about the situation, meeting sources said.

The current EC, which was reconstituted by the military backed caretaker government on February 4, 2007, brought sweeping electoral reforms to encourage honest and competent candidates

in local government elections.

The EC also promulgated strict electoral rules and a code of conduct for electioneering, but those have apparently been unable to keep individuals with criminal notoriety at bay.

The caretaker government also promulgated new laws regarding formations and functions of city corporations and municipalities and on holding of elections to those, imposing some new restrictions on candidacies in the polls.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda, while announcing on June 20 the August 4 schedule for the polls to four city corporations and nine municipalities, also said the promulgated electoral rules had been formed in a way so honest and competent

candidates may get a chance to contest in the polls.

But at yesterday's EC meeting the poll chief expressed his dissatisfaction noticing the questionable past of many candidates selected for the August 4 local government polls through the last two days' scrutiny of their applications, the sources said.

The other two election commissioners also share the feeling with their chief.

The August 4 polls are going to be the first ever elections under the current EC since its reconstitution, and it is considering those as test cases to be held under the state of emergency.

But soon after the announcement of the poll schedule, many

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

41 killed in suicide attack on Indian embassy in Kabul

Diplomat, military attache among the dead

AEP, Kabul New Delhi

A suicide car bomber rammed the Indian embassy in Kabul yesterday, killing 41 people including two Indian envoys in the Afghan capital's deadliest attack since the 2001 fall of the Taliban, officials said.

The blast in the heart of the city scattered human flesh and severed limbs in front of the embassy compound, tearing down an outside security office and part of a wall. Charred and bloodied bodies littered a road outside.

"The toll of casualties we have so far is 41 martyred and 139 wounded. Among those killed are six policemen," Afghan interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary told AFP.

Many of the dead were Afghans

collecting Indian visas.

The Indian embassy's military attache and a political counsellor were killed along with two Indian guards. The body of one of the diplomats was flung onto the roof of the embassy and only found hours later, officials said.

Indian ambassador Jayan Prasad, who was not hurt in the explosion heard across the city centre, told AFP the suicide attacker rammed the diplomats' vehicle as it was entering through the gates of the embassy compound.

"The embassy has been blown up badly, the outer structures," another embassy official said on condition of anonymity. "We are walking on rubble."

The nearby Indonesian

embassy was also damaged and five Afghan security guards and two Indonesian diplomats were hurt, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was quoted as saying in Jakarta.

The blast was the worst in Kabul since the start of an Islamist insurgency launched after the hardline Taliban were toppled from government by US-led forces for harbouring the al-Qaeda network after the 9/11 attacks.

The Taliban have carried out a wave of suicide bombings across the country in the past seven years, but a spokesman for the movement denied his group was involved in the Indian embassy attack.

"We have not done it," spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed said.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Afghan policemen inspect the site of a suicide attack in front of the Indian Embassy in Kabul yesterday. Diplomats, security personnel, and Afghans collecting Indian visas were among the dead.