

Govt keenly fights

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bring the two leaders to a dialogue. Additional Attorney General (AAG) Mansur Habib, who represented the government in the HC, told newsmen that he opposed Hasina's bail prayer at the instructions of the "authorities concerned".

Talking to journalists, barrister Rafique said Hasina—now abroad on parole for treatment—should come back home as a free person having secured bail in all cases she is standing trial.

In a situation where Khaleda got released on bail and Hasina is on parole, no dialogue can be held between them, he said.

"Now Sheikh Hasina can say—and she has every right to say it—that she will not have any meeting with Khaleda Zia. I will not have anything to do if Sheikh Hasina said she would not sit in any meeting with Khaleda Zia without getting released on bail," said barrister Rafique.

Based on an apparent understanding with the government earlier this month, Khaleda got bail in four cases and the government attorneys did not oppose filing of the bail petitions in favour of Khaleda at that time.

Earlier on September 23, a vacation bench of the HC sent back two bail petitions filed on behalf of Hasina in the Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission since the HC bench did not have the jurisdiction to hear the petitions.

Following submissions from both sides, an HC vacation bench comprised of Justice Sheikh Rezwan Ali and Justice Md Rais Uddin fixed September 29 for passing order on Hasina's bail petition in the Tk 5 crore extortion case filed by Noor Ali.

The HC bench also asked the AAG to submit within this period a Supreme Court order that granted bail to Khaleda's son Tarique Rahman on health grounds for considering Hasina's bail petition on similar grounds.

AAG Mansur opposed the bail prayer, saying Hasina, who is now on parole, sought bail for taking part in the next general elections. "Sheikh Hasina has been travelling to different European countries and even recently attended a marriage ceremony in the Netherlands. She was released on parole on health grounds on the basis of a medical report prepared in June this year. The medical reports of her recent health condition needed to be scrutinised for considering her bail prayers," he said.

The AL chief's lawyers said they would submit the petitions to another HC bench on September 29 for hearing.

Rafique-ul-Huq said both he and the government had been trying to seat the two leaders together, but now the government's policy about Hasina's release seemed unclear to them.

"I am confused if the attorney general's office is complying with the instructions of the law ministry and if it has any communication with the ministry. How will the meeting between Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina be held if Hasina does not get released on bail?" he said.

He, however, expressed hope about holding of the meeting

between the two former premiers.

Earlier yesterday, he prayed to the HC to grant Hasina bail on health grounds saying both the Appellate and HC divisions had granted bail to several accused including Tarique Rahman, Sigma Huda, Salaudinn Quader Chowdhury and Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir in similar cases.

Replying to a question, AAG Mansur told reporters that he had not opposed Hasina's bail petition in the Tk 3 crore extortion case filed by Azam J Chowdhury since his client, the government, did not supply him with sufficient materials for contesting the prayer.

Noor Ali, managing director of Unique Group of Companies, filed the case with Teigaon Police Station on June 13 last year, accusing Hasina and her two relatives of extorting Tk 5 crore for mediating between the Power Development Board and his firm for a power plant deal back in 1997.

The government on July 16 last year brought the case under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) and a magistrate's court ordered on July 29 that Hasina be shown arrested in the case.

ACC sits

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(BD) Ltd, and forwarded the matter to ACC for further action.

She alleged ACC did not make any probe into the matter for mysterious reasons except changing the enquiry officer three times.

Ok-Kyung Oh, who claims to have been removed from the post of managing director of the same company illegally in 2004, alleges that ACC Commissioner Abul Hasan Manzoor Mannan is holding back the file regarding filing of the case.

"If an ACC commissioner is holding back a file like this, then who's going to fight against corruption?" Ok-Kyung Oh asks.

"If ACC cannot file this case even after having such documents, the commission cannot file any case regarding corruption," she adds.

Contacted, Mannan told The Daily Star. "The allegation is not true. Maybe she has misunderstood me. She might have said that Customs Bond Commissionerate did not scrutinise her allegations earlier."

On delay in ACC action regarding the matter, he said, "The officer entrusted with enquiry earlier collected all the information but did not 'take' those 'into' cognisance, especially those technically important for this case."

"I don't know why the officer did that," he said, adding, "As we have understood all aspects of the matter by now, it would be disposed of soon."

Mentioning the recent taskforce report regarding the matter, Ok-Kyung Oh told journalists \$7.5 million amounts to Tk 52.35 crore was laundered from 2000 till 2007 through over invoice.

She also complains that two former committees formed by the Bangladesh Bank and Customs Bond Commissionerate could not conduct impartial investigation and were influenced by former communications minister Nazmul Huda and his wife Sigma Huda during tenure of the four-party alliance government.

Bail to over

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Describing the extension of bail and stay orders as routine work, the petitioners' lawyers said it was nothing unusual.

"Earlier, the High Court had granted ad interim or anticipatory bail to the petitioners and stayed the proceedings of some of the cases," barrister Mahbubuddin Khokon, standing up for four petitioners including Tarique Rahman, said.

The court also issued rules on the government to explain why those case proceedings should not be quashed and why the petitioners should not be granted regular bail, he explained.

"The rules are still pending with the High Court. In the circumstances, the High Court extended the bail and stay orders," he said.

He said Tarique Rahman filed two petitions for extension of bail and stay orders in two extortion cases.

Moudud Ahmed and Tariqul Islam filed two similar petitions while Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu filed three for extending the tenure of earlier HC orders, he said.

The lawyers said all the cases were filed after the caretaker government took over on January 11 last year.

Half of advance

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passengers during the Eid. They would allow the same number of standing passengers to travel by train if necessary, he added.

Sources said till yesterday afternoon a total of 6,847 advance tickets were sold for September 25, while 7,435 for September 26, 5,436 for September 27 and 6,670 for September 28.

Besides, 9,529 advance tickets for September 29, 10,405 for September 30 and 1,025 for October 01 had been sold.

BR sources said most tickets were sold at Kamalapur Railway Station. Around 500 tickets were sold at Cantonment and Airport stations and 1,000 at Joydevpur station.

A total of 34 trains will leave for various destinations from Kamalapur, Cantonment and Joydevpur stations. Of those, 17 intercity trains and 12 mail trains will be operated from Kamalapur station and five others from Cantonment station.

Although fixed dates for selling advance tickets had ended, train ticket seekers seemed to be happy as they did not have to struggle for tickets.

Only a few people were seen queuing up in front of ticket counters at Kamalapur station yesterday.

The situation at city bus terminals was also similar. No rush of homebound people was seen at Gabtoli, Mohakhali or Sayedabad bus terminals.

Sources, however, said most advance tickets for luxurious buses on long routes are sold out. But there was no crisis of tickets of other buses on both long and short routes.

Bus owners and operators said the rush for tickets would start two or three days before the Eid day.

Although there was no rush of homebound people, the drivers of taxicabs and CNG-run three wheelers have been charging extra fares from passengers ahead of the Eid.

BNP unfazed

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Asked whether the four-party alliance would be expanded further to counter the grand alliance's latest move, he said, "We'll expand the alliance, if needed."

The Iftar party was organised by the Mohammadpur unit BNP and attended by standing committee members Tanbir Ahmed Siddiqy and Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmad, Vice-president MK Anwar, Office Secretary Rizvy Ahmad, among others.

Pointing at MK Anwar's Tuesday's comment on getting registered with the Election Commission, Delwar said everyone in the party should not talk (on party decisions).

"It's the party secretary general who will convey party's position on different matters; besides, there is the party chairperson to that end," Delwar added.

Asked whether BNP would get registered with EC under the new electoral laws, he said they (four-party alliance) will take the decision after discussing it in the party forum and with other components of the alliance.

Ahead of the stalled ninth parliamentary election scheduled for January 22 last year, the AL-led 14-party formed a grand alliance bringing in Jatiya Party (Ershad), LDP and BDB.

But the grand alliance became ineffective with the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11 last year.

Emerging from a meeting with Khaleda Zia on September 18 at Shafiq Rehman's Eskaton residence, Salaudinn Quader Chowdhury told reporters efforts are on to expand the alliance.

"Our party leaders discussed the issue today," he said.

Gas price hike

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Petrobangla proposed increasing gas prices for commercial users by 26.08 percent, meaning that per-unit (1,000 cubic feet or 1 mcf) price of gas will go up to Tk 291.59 from the existing Tk 233.12.

Earlier, Petrobangla Chairman Jalal Ahmed said in the proposal that his organisation's cumulative deficit on account of undercut gas supply to international oil companies is about Tk 2,000 crore.

"If we do not raise gas prices, Petrobangla will have to go bankrupt soon, which will ultimately make it unable to go for further exploration," he had said to justify the merit of the government move.

During his expression of opinions as an independent expert at the hearing, Prof Nurul Islam of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) strongly supported the proposed hike.

"There is no way but to increase gas prices for minimising the losses of Petrobangla," he said.

He hinted at the lack of transparency in gas distribution by some companies to make a windfall profit. "I firmly believe that smooth supply of gas can be ensured by increasing the price of this natural resource," he said.

Opposing the hike proposal, representatives of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, CAB, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation said the prices of foodstuffs would go up again in local markets as the prices of agri-inputs would also go up following the gas price hike.

"As a result, the country's food security will be at a crossroads. So, the price hike should be at a rational level," the representative of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said at the hearing. He expressed concern that stagnation and increase of urban poverty would stem from hiked gas prices.

The representative from the state-owned Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) also said a fresh price hike of gas would seriously hamper power development.

Earlier, in its proposal submitted to the BERC on June 23, Petrobangla suggested a variable

3 injured

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were critical. BCMCL official said all necessary actions have been taken for their treatment.

Miners were mining in Phase-1104 around 11:45pm Tuesday and at the same time a number of Bangladeshis and Chinese workers were repairing an electric wire on the wall of Phase-1104. Suddenly the wire caught fire and burnt the two workers.

BCMCL officials told The Daily Star that a few thousand metres of electric cables are down there and the short-circuit incident was a major one.

Sources said the authorities are likely to start the fire investigation today as Bangladeshis and Chinese workforces in the mine are blaming each other for the incident.

Prize could go to Chinese dissident

price hike for its different categories of consumers, the average hike being 65 percent.

Petrobangla suggested raising the price to Tk 600 for domestic consumers from the existing Tk 400 for a double-burner oven and Tk 550 for a single-burner oven against the present rate of Tk 350. The rise in this case is 50 percent.

Domestic consumers using meters will have to pay Tk 208 instead of Tk 130 with an increase of 26.81 percent.

For industrial consumers, the proposed per-unit price of gas is Tk 182.25, a 23.03 percent raise over the present rate of Tk 148.13. The same rate will apply to tea-estates.

For captive power plants, the proposed rate is Tk 182.25 per unit, a 72.60 percent increase from the present Tk 105.59.

Petrobangla proposed Tk 93.73 per unit for the PDB, independent power producers, and small power plants instead of Tk 73.91, raising the gas price by 26.81 percent.

For fertiliser industries, Tk 93.73 has been proposed with an increase of 47.81 percent from the present Tk 63.41 per unit.

Concluding the hearing, the BERC will announce its final decision by October 30 through an official order to Petrobangla.

BERC Chairman Ghulam Rahman said the BERC would keep records of all pre- and post-hearing public opinions until October 6 and that public opinions would be received during this stipulated timeframe.

Transparent

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fray in a new context, reached the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Kamalapur in the capital yesterday.

These imports are going to be used—for the first time in Bangladesh—for polling in the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 18, closely followed by upazila polls on December 24 and 28.

EC Joint Secretary Md Rafiqul Islam and Deputy Election Commissioner for Dhaka Division Biswas Lutfar Rahman received the consignment on behalf of the commission in the morning. And, in no time, the EC officials began sending 17,000 boxes to the election offices.

EC sources said these transparent ballot boxes are being brought from abroad by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), under a receipt meant for the country's democratic development.

The UN agency was also involved in the preparation of the new digitised photo voter list under a reform scheme undertaken following the past crisis over the issues of general election that was eventually cancelled in January last year.

Rafiqul Islam said the remaining ballot boxes will arrive by October 30.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain yesterday told reporters that one trainer from Canada would conduct a training programme for one hour with 30 people to teach them how to use the transparent ballot boxes.

Nobel Peace Prize could go to Chinese dissident

AFP, Oslo

The Nobel Peace Prize could go to a Chinese dissident this year as a way of keeping human rights pressure on Beijing as it basks in the glow of a successful Olympics, an expert said yesterday.

"The prize this year will finally go to a Chinese dissident and I believe that the most likely is Hu Jia, perhaps together with his wife," said Stein Toennesson, director of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

"He has become the most well-known Chinese dissident."

Hu is an ardent campaigner for civil rights, environmental protection and AIDS advocacy in China.

He was arrested last year and sentenced to three-and-a-half years in jail for subversion.

A total of 197 people and organisations are up for the Nobel Peace Prize, which will be awarded on October 10. The list is kept a tightly guarded secret.

The Nobel committee now had a better opportunity to award the prize to a Chinese dissident, Toennesson told reporters.

He said that "after the successful Olympics, (China) should be mature and in a position where it might encounter such a prize without really getting angry or breaking off relations with Norway."

Chinese and international human rights activists say this summer's Olympics in Beijing did not bring hope for changes with China's human rights record.

"During the Games, we saw that there was quite a lot of repression, this very immature kind of handling of human rights and of democracy, trying to censor journalists," said Janne Haaland Matlary, professor of international politics at the University of Oslo.

"Obviously this is a golden opportunity to underline that this is not acceptable."

In the past, Geir Lundestad, the influential secretary of the five-member Norwegian Nobel committee has said that "sooner or later the Chinese question must be tackled."

Ctg cop held

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money to two police sources Zahid and Javed. Zahid was later arrested but Javed went into hiding.

ASI Rahman and Zahid were sent to prison in the afternoon.

Police said Rahman along with the two sources went to the residence of Saiful Islam, a businessman of Najumiarhat in Hatazari Tuesday night. They threatened to arrest him on charges of involvement in hundi trade.

Under pressure Saiful paid the police officer Tk 2.80 lakh.

Later, Saiful filed a case with Hathazari Police Station.

6 advisers

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cial said no policy or important decisions are taken in their absence.

Fakhruddin, who is in charge of the establishment and information ministries, is attending the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York City.

He also heads the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat and the Cabinet Division.

He ended a five-day official visit to China on Friday and left the country the following day on a 10-day tour hours after announcing dates for the parliamentary and upazila polls.

He is expected to return home on September 30.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, who also heads the crucial expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, is accompanying the chief adviser.

Adviser Rasheda K Choudhury, holding three ministries: primary and mass education, women and children affairs and the cultural affairs, has been abroad since September 17.

She left the country on a personal visit on September 17 and was supposed to join the CA-led delegation at the annual UNGA session. Officials at the primary and mass education ministry said she is unlikely to come back before Eid-ul-Fitr.

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman flew over to the United States on September 17 to attend an international seminar on education. He is expected to return home on September 30.

Finance and Planning Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam went to Saudi Arabia on Sunday. During his visit he will meet Islamic Development Bank President Dr Ahmed Mohammed Ali in Jeddah and discuss matters of mutual interest.

He is scheduled to fly back on September 29, said an official release.

Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, also in charge of the public works and housing ministry, left Dhaka on September 15 for a seminar in Geneva. He was scheduled to come back Monday, but later changed it to today.

AL's poll allies meet

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leaders sat together was at a grand rally in Paltan Maidan, a day before the state of emergency was promulgated in the country.

"We have gathered together in a bid to start fighting unitedly against the evil forces that destroyed the country during their five-year in the government," said Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad yesterday, alluding to the immediate past four-party alliance regime.

"We are still in the grand alliance and it will be expanded. The grand alliance will win the next election. Victory is a must for humane forces," said Bikalpadhara Bangladesh (BDB) President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury during an iftar organised by AL in the capital.

Workers Party and Gono Forum however expressed their opposition to forming any coalition with JP (Ershad) calling its president an autocrat, and also with Islamist parties.

Talking to reporters AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said 14-party is their core coalition and they will take a decision regarding revival of the grand alliance after consulting their 14-party partners following return of their President Sheikh Hasina from abroad.

He also said the grand alliance is likely to be expanded if revived.

Leaders of the components of AL-led 14-party coalition, of JP (Ershad), BDB, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), JP (Manju), Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ), and Islamic Front Bangladesh (IFB) attended the iftar in a community centre.

Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Harun-or-Rashid, Salma Islam, Jaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, and Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury also attended the iftar among other civil society members.

LDP leader Sheikh Razzak Ali also a former speaker of the parliament said they joined the iftar as they still belong to the grand alliance.

Senior AL leaders led by Presidium Member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam welcomed the grand alliance leaders.

But AL Acting President Zillur Rahman was not present, as according to his party colleagues, he had to attend another iftar with AL leaders in his electoral constituency Bhairab-Kuliarchar of Kishoreganj.

Sajeda said their party will move forward with all who are pro-liberation war, democratic and secular.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu said everything must be done to keep BNP-Jamaat-led forces out of power. The left political leader however said JP is no

more against the principles of 14-party coalition.

JP (Manju) Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam said they will always be with pro-liberation war forces.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said they want unity among secular democratic forces.

Earlier at a media conference in his party office, he said they will not form any electoral alliance if fundamentalist, communal or autocratic forces including Ershad's JP are included.

He also said the mega alliance is still a mere idea. He however added that they will talk to AL about the matter.

JP leaders Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud and Zuiddin Ahmed Bablu, LDP leader Prof Jahannara Begum, BDB leaders Maj (ret'd) MA Mannan and Mahi B Chowdhury, Gono Forum leader Pankaj Bhattacharya, IOJ Chairman Misbaur Rahman, IFB Chairman Syed Bahadur Shah, National Awami Party leader MA Gani, and Communist Kendra leader Asit Baran Roy also attended the iftar among other grand alliance leaders.

Cut in land

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committee on "Modernised Land Management and Registration", formed on February 12 and headed by former adviser to the caretaker government Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, submitted its recommendation to the RRC meeting yesterday.

The RRC meeting approved the recommendations with some additional suggestions. Now the recommendations will be placed before the cabinet committee following the approval of the Chief Adviser's Office.

As the present tax rate is high and it promotes corruption, the RRC members suggested that the taskforce to revise and reduce the land registration tariffs. The taskforce recommended digitisation of the country's entire land records and turning district administration offices into monitoring bodies from its present role of service provider to ensure transparency and reduce corruption.

The five-member taskforce said a commission should be formed comprising government and non-government experts to spearhead modernisation of records and land registration system.

But the RRC differed from the view put forward by the taskforce about forming a commission. It suggested that a committee be formed comprised of government, non-government and representatives from business communities in digitisation of land records and registration system.

Hasina to sit

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about a meeting between Khaleda Zia and me, I think my stance in this regard should be revealed to the people."

"Under the circumstances, I want to firmly say that I have no objection to any dialogue held in the greater interest of the country. I am ready to sit with anyone anywhere. But a dialogue without a specific issue or objective has the potential to create fresh problems or crises in the country," sources said quoting her as saying in the email.

AL, however, did not make public the email received a few days ago. Only a few senior AL leaders knew about the email. Surprisingly, a number of senior AL leaders including Presidium member Amir Hossain Amu termed the letter a rumour.

A senior AL Presidium member, having close ties to the party chief, read the email to The Daily Star.

AL Presidium member Suranjit Sengupta confirmed reporters about the email and said the AL chief does not think that bringing the two leaders to a single table would be easy.

Hasina said she does not want to be involved in a process that misleads people. She neither wants to be in a dialogue which is not meant for the country's welfare.

"My apprehension is that the dialogue has been proposed so that the blame for one's [Khaleda's] failures could be equally shared by two leaders. The dialogue may attempt to weigh a successful, competent and pro-people government with a dishonest, corrupt and incompetent one [BNP-Jamaat alliance government] on the same scale," she said.

She said she believes that a cordial relationship could be achieved if Khaleda retreats from the path of mistakes and ousts from her party the people who were involved in killing AL men.

Hasina claimed that BNP assuming power in 2001, tortured and repressed hundreds of AL leaders. She claimed BNP men killed many including Shah AMS Kibria and Ahsanullah Master. She blamed BNP for the August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue, which was also an attempt on her life.

"If BNP does not rectify itself, I will have to exchange courtesy at the dialogue with those who killed Kibria, Ahsanullah Master and Ivy Rahman and tried to kill me," the AL president said expressing doubt about how cordial the dialogue would be.

"It has been indicated in the proposal for the dialogue that there is something that can be solved through talks between the two leaders, but I could not find any such thing," she said.