

## SAMRAT'S BAIL ACC seeks its cancellation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday filed a petition with the High Court seeking the cancellation of the bail granted to expelled Jubo League leader Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat in a corruption case.

In the petition, the commission also sought a stay on the lower court order that granted the bail to Samrat, one of the "casino kingpins" of Dhaka.

Citing the petition, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that the lower court concerned has granted bail to Samrat on medical grounds.

Samrat has been receiving treatment at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. Because of the gravity of his offence, he cannot be granted bail, he said, adding that the HC will hold a hearing on the petition today.

On May 11, Judge Al Asad Md Asifuzzaman of Dhaka Special Judge Court-6 granted bail to Samrat in the corruption case.

Samrat and his associate Enamul Haque Arman were detained from Chaudhagram in Comilla by the Rapid Action Battalion on October 6, 2019.

Later that day, RAB raided his Kakrail office and seized huge quantities of foreign liquor, pistols and two hides of kangaroo.

On November 12, ACC lodged a complaint against him for acquiring assets worth Tk 2.94 crore beyond his known sources of income.

## Georgia jails pro-opposition media owner

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgia yesterday jailed for over three years an owner of the nation's most popular television station critical of the government, further raising concerns over media freedom in the country.



Nadezhda, 66, walks at a cemetery in search of her relative's grave in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict in the settlement of Staryi Krym outside Mariupol on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Putin warns Finland, Sweden over Nato

### Ukrainian troops reach border after pushing Russian forces back from Kharkiv

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday warned Finland and Sweden to expect a "response" for applying to join Nato as Ukrainian troops reached border after pushing Russian forces back from the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

The expansion of Nato to Sweden and Finland poses "no direct threat for us... but the expansion of military infrastructure to these territories will certainly provoke our response," Putin said during a televised summit meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

The Moscow-led military alliance includes six countries of the former Soviet Union: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. "This is a problem that is created completely artificially, because it is done in the foreign policy interests of the United States," Putin said, adding that Nato has become a "foreign policy instrument of one country".

"All this exacerbates an already difficult international security environment," Putin said.

Finland and Sweden are poised to

jettison decades of military non-alignment to join Nato as a defence against feared aggression from Russia after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24.

Finland announced its intention to join Nato on Sunday and Sweden's government formally decided to apply for Nato membership yesterday.

Speaking at the CSTO meeting hosted in Moscow, Belarusian President and close Putin ally Alexander Lukashenko was the only other leader from the six-nation bloc to address the Nato expansion and back military action in Ukraine.

"Nato is aggressively building up its muscles, yesterday drawing in the neutral Finland and Sweden," said Lukashenko, who in February allowed Russian troops to enter Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

He also accused Washington of a "desire to prolong as much as possible" the conflict in Ukraine, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops have pushed Russian forces back from the northeastern city of Kharkiv and some have advanced as far as the border with Russia, Ukrainian officials said yesterday.

The developments, if confirmed, would

signal a further shift in momentum in favour of Ukraine.

And in another setback for Putin, McDonald's Corp MCD.N, the world's largest fast food chain, said it was pulling out of Russia because of the conflict.

In Brussels, the European Union was working on a package of further economic sanctions on Russia to step up international pressure on Putin, reports Reuters.

On the battlefields near Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, interior ministry adviser Vadym Denisenko said Ukrainian troops were mounting a counter-offensive.

"It can no longer be stopped... Thanks to this, we can go to the rear of the Russian group of forces," he said.

Ukraine's defence ministry said the 227th Battalion of the 127th Brigade of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces had reached the border with Russia.

The governor of the Luhansk region in Donbas, Serhiy Gaidai, said the situation "remains difficult", with Russian forces trying to capture the town of Sieverodonetsk.

## Govt looking at five options

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will have to sell their wheat. We will try to get wheat from them somehow."

As much as 86 percent of Bangladesh's annual demand for 85 lakh tonnes of wheat is met from imports.

In 2020, the country started bringing in wheat from India in large volumes for shorter shipment times and lower costs.

In the financial year

that ended on March 31, Bangladesh was the largest importer of wheat, accounting for nearly half of India's record 7 million tonnes of wheat exports, according to estimates by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the commerce ministry.

The government will also not take a hard stance against traders who hoarded oil illegally for the sake of stability in the market.

"We are business-friendly. We fix the price in line with the global market. If there is a fixed price in the market, the market will remain stable."

He also reiterated that trusting traders was a mistake.

"We made a mistake by not fixing the edible oil price for the last two months in a row. If we had, they would not have taken the opportunity."

Regarding onions, he said the price of onion is a little higher now but within the reach of consumers.

"We are ensuring that the farmers get a fair price, which would be at least Tk 25 per kg, as the production cost is around Tk 18-20 per kg. Besides, we are focusing on the fact that consumers can buy onions at Tk 45 per kg, including transportation and other expenses."

## Everyone can speak freely on talk shows

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"Once the mega projects for infrastructure development are fully implemented, the private sector will have more dynamism," she said.

Replying to critics of mega projects, the PM said they only see the expenditure without considering the people's benefits from this spending and its contribution to the economy.

The premier called for taking effective initiatives

to ensure that international commitments are appropriately met for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Hasina also stressed the need for ensuring the best use of funds and preventing its waste as well as continuing policy support and funding for the implementation of SDGs.

She said her government will be able to achieve the goals before 2030 provided

all work together.

The PM mentioned that Bangladesh's success in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) improved its image internationally.

"Our government is committed to implementing the Agenda 2030 or the Sustainable Development Goals to continue this pace of development," she said.

Hasina said Bangladesh has already made

significant progress in formulating plans and strategies to implement the global development agenda for the 2016-2030 period.

Referring to the changed scenario due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war which is leading the entire world into an economic recession and hit on the economy, the PM asked all to ensure optimum use of arable land and maintain austerity in using water, electricity, and food.

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## Take steps to extradite Halder

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to produce Halder and five others before a court dealing with cases under Money Laundering Prevention Act today, seeking extension of their remand.

It has been quizzing Halder, ex-managing director of NRB Global Bank, on remand since Saturday following the arrest the same day.

Halder, who was at the centre of scams through which Tk 10,200 crore had been siphoned from four non-banking financial institutions, fled Bangladesh in 2019.

He moved to Ashoknagar of North 24 Parganas, posing as an Indian national under the alias Shibshankar Halder and acquired real estate in West Bengal. He used to introduce himself as a real estate promoter and financial expert.

**DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA** The ED is probing whether any influential people in India helped Halder stay in Ashoknagar after he had sneaked into the country from Bangladesh.

"We are checking if PK

Halder and his associates received support from any influential person in the state [West Bengal] in obtaining Indian passport and identity cards through forged documents. This is not possible without the involvement of locals.

"We will also examine if money was channelled through any influential person or any other means as he floated some companies in here also," said a source in the ED on the condition of anonymity.

ED officials came to know that Halder's close aide Sukumar Mridha, purportedly a fish trader, provided him with logistic support in Ashoknagar.

"Sukumar was a fish trader with good local connections. His daughter and son-in-law helped Halder to a great extent. We have come to know that money has been channelled to their accounts also," said the ED source.

Earlier on Friday, the ED raided the houses of Mridha and his son-in-law in Ashoknagar town. They were arrested and the ED

seized several documents.

Halder took the help of Mridha to acquire property and got into Ashoknagar's real estate network.

**'INDIA DESERVES THANKS'**

Expressing satisfaction over the arrests of Halder and his cohorts, a bench of Bangladesh's High Court has said the Indian government should be thanked for this.

"Our message is clear. We have zero tolerance for any kind of money laundering and corruption. No corrupt or money launderers will be spared," the bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo said yesterday.

The bench made the observation after Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told it about media reports on Halder's arrest.

He requested the HC to set a date for hearing the pending suo muto (voluntary) rule issued on November 19, 2020, over the government steps to arrest Halder.

The court said the matter will be included in today's hearing list.

On November 19, 2020, the HC bench led by Justice Nazrul wanted to know what steps had been taken to arrest Halder and bring him home.

## TTE Shafiqul

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the complainant to lodge the complaint, and ensuring an apology by Emrul for his actions.

On May 5, TTE Shafiqul from the Pakshey Division of Bangladesh Railway was suspended after he fined three passengers who were travelling without tickets, introducing themselves as the railways minister relatives.

Emrul is a nephew of Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan's wife.

Shafiqul returned to his work on May 9 after his suspension order was withdrawn amid widespread criticism.

Guard Shariful, however, denied the allegation against him.

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"We will consider importing rice if our target is not met," said the secretary.

Last year, the government procured 10.6 lakh tonnes of rice against a target of 11.5 lakh tonnes and procured 3 lakh tonnes of paddy against a target of 6.5 lakh tonnes. The procurement prices of paddy and rice were Tk 27 and Tk 40 a kg respectively. The rates are the same this year.

This year's procurement started on April 28.

The Directorate of Food procured 4,909 tonnes of food grains till May 15, while the government silos have the capacity to store 19.3 lakh tonnes.

This is only the public stock that the government uses to support economically vulnerable people. The main stock is maintained and handled by farmers and private sector businesses.

**'PRESSURE ON MAIN STAPLE'**

Though a bumper Boro production ensures food

security for several months, things could be different this year due to rising food prices.

Already within 24 hours of India's export ban, wheat prices rose 25 percent in the local market. Since the Ukraine war began in February, imports of wheat from Russia and its neighbouring countries have stopped.

As people are already burdened for months with increasing prices of essentials like diesel, edible oil and grains, among other things, they would not be able to spend much money on a variety of food.

So, the pressure on the main staple will increase in the coming months.

"Consumers will spend most of their food budget on rice. So, the demand for rice will increase in the coming days and the government should keep it in mind," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, additional research director of CPD.

Referring to the Indian

## VoA journo's mother found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Police yesterday recovered the body of Setara Halim, 75, mother of Amir Khasru, a journalist of Voice of America Bangla service, from her house in Pirojpur town.

Setara lived alone on the second floor of her two-storied house in the town's CI Para area. Two families live on the ground floor as tenants, said the victim's daughter Salma Arju, who lives in Bagerhat. Her two other siblings -- Rehana Munni and brother Amir Khasru -- live in Dhaka.

She said a local painter, Abdul Quddus, who went to the house for work around 8:00am, had told the tenants downstairs that Setara was not opening her door.

They then called Arju, in the presence of whom, Quddus climbed to the second floor and found Setara's body on the ground.

Police recovered the body at around 11:00am and sent it for autopsy.

"We found a red spot on her throat. She might have been strangled to death," said ASP Thander Khairul Hasan.

SP Mohammad Saidur Rahman said, "We are trying to trace the killers and to unearth the motive."

Amir Khasru said, "I want justice [for my mother]. I hope law enforcers will trace the killers as soon as possible."

## Man sentenced to life for child's rape, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A Bagerhat court yesterday sentenced Kalim Sheikh, 30, to life imprisonment for the rape and murder of a 12-year-old.

Judge Md SM Saiful Islam of Bagerhat Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-1 passed the order yesterday noon.

On May 18, 2012, Kalim offered the victim, Zakia, some fruit and took her to the abandoned home in Madhyapara area of Barabaria. There, he raped and then killed her.

Public Prosecutor Siddiqur Rahman said the plaintiffs were satisfied with the court's exemplary verdict.

## Three arrested for raping 2 cousins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three men were arrested yesterday on charges of gangraping two cousins in Khulna's Batiaghata upazila.

The arrestees are Nacem, 25, Mujahid Sheikh, 24, and Azizul Morol, 25.

Zahidur Rahman, OC (Investigation) of Batiaghata Police Station, said the mother of one of the victims filed a case early yesterday.

He said of the cousins, one is 13 while the other is 24 and a mother of an infant.

According to the case, when the 13-year-old's parents were away, the three broke into their house around midnight and raped the two.

"During primary investigation, all three accused confessed to the rape."