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RELEASE FROM JAIL

Fakhrul, Abbas will have to wait longer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though BNP leaders Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Mirza Abbas have got bail from the High Court in a case filed over Nayapaltan clashes, they cannot get released from jail until January 8 as the Supreme Court chamber judge yesterday directed them not to furnish bail bonds until that day.

Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, after a brief hearing, refused to stay the HC order that granted six months' bail to BNP Secretary General Fakhrul and Standing Committee Member Abbas on January 3.

The chamber judge also sent the state's petition, filed against the HC order

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Eighty-five-year-old Rashida Begum picking up one grain of ripened Aman at a time in Khulna's Choyghoria village. Every day, she gathers around 2-3kgs of whatever has fallen to the ground during harvest. She plans to give whatever she has collected to the millers to get rice for herself. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Respect rule of law

US urges political parties in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

The US has called on all political parties in Bangladesh to respect the rule of law and refrain from violence, harassment and intimidation.

"Genuine elections require the ability of all candidates to engage voters free from violence, harassment and intimidation," said Ned Price, spokesman of the US Department of State, during a regular media briefing in Washington DC on January 3.

The US call on the Bangladesh government to investigate reports of violence, harassment, intimidation and unjustified detention thoroughly, transparently and impartially and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Price went on to call on the Bangladesh government to ensure that no party or candidate threatens, incites, or conducts violence against another party or candidate.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Monday said the government is not worried about the next national election, noting that the election will be held timely and fairly.

"Election will be held at the time of election. We believe in people," he told reporters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The government is committed to holding a "free, fair, transparent, and inclusive" election.

"It would be good if all parties join the next election. If not, that is okay too," he said.

Asked whether the government could assure the foreigners about a fair election, Momen said: "It's not our headache -- it is your headache. Why should I assure foreigners? If we work accordingly, they will understand."

The next election is still far and in other countries, they see election-related events just two months ahead of the scheduled election.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

We want better energy ties with Delhi: Nasrul

ASIFUR RAHMAN, from New Delhi

Bangladesh wants deeper ties with India in energy and power sector to avoid future energy crisis, State Minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid said yesterday.

"We want to import power from Nepal and Bhutan. For that, we need the cooperation of India as the transmission line would be through the country," he said at a briefing after meetings with India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Power Minister Raj Kumar Singh in New Delhi.

"The two ministers assured us of extending their cooperation," he said at the Bangladesh high commission where the briefing was held.

Nasrul said, "We want to open the fuel market to the private sector, which India has done successfully ... We needed to know the process and method of keeping the fuel price stable when the global oil prices surge."

The state minister also said the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline will be inaugurated from Assam's Numaligarh Refinery Ltd this year with the two prime ministers present.

"The project is nearly complete and we want to start fuel import from India through the pipeline at an affordable cost before the upcoming election," he added.

A day before, the state minister told reporters in Jharkhand that they would try to find an opportunity to

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Forex market continues to stay under pressure

Situation unlikely to ease in next six months

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Come January there won't be any volatility in the foreign exchange market -- was the overarching message from the government in the past couple of months. January has arrived, and the situation is dicey as before.

Instead of clawing its way back up, reserves will come down to \$32.6 billion after the \$1.12 billion payment made to the Asian Clearing Union for imports made from South Asian countries in November and December.

On Tuesday, Bangladesh Bank hiked its dollar selling rate by Tk 1 to Tk 100 for the first time.

"There is no sign of improvement -- there is no seriousness among the policymakers either," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

There have been no assured policy measures to arrest the shrinking reserves.

The interest rate cap and the resistance to floating exchange rate continue, Hussain said.

These two steps could have brought corrections in the foreign exchange market, as they would have struck a balance between the demand and supply of dollars.

Imports have been reined in to

some extent, the export trend is decent and the remittance inflow is not up to expectations, said Ahsan H. Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute.

"So, there was no visible impact on the foreign exchange market," he said.

In July, imports stood at \$5.9 billion, which increased to \$6.8 billion in August. In September and October, imports dropped slightly.



In November, it hit \$7 billion.

So in the first five months of fiscal 2022-23, imports stood at \$32.5 billion, up 4.4 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

Remittance edged up 1.7 percent in the first half of fiscal 2022-23 to \$10.41 billion.

Admittedly, the trade deficit, which is when the country's imports exceed its exports, and the current account deficit, which is when a country sends more money

abroad than it receives from abroad, have declined, Hussain said.

"But the financial account has gone negative after many years. The financial account itself needs financing," he said, adding that there is a diversion in the foreign exchange market in the form of capital flight.

The financial account reports foreign ownership of domestic assets and domestic ownership of foreign assets. If it increases, that means foreign money is flowing into the country.

If it decreases, the country's money is flowing into foreign markets -- and that is a situation Bangladesh currently finds itself in.

"Along with hundi, corruption is taking place at banks, so money is being laundered out of Bangladesh," Hussain said, citing the Islami Bank's lending of Tk 7,246 crore to nine non-existent companies as a case in point.

That amount is most likely siphoned out of Bangladesh.

"Corruption like that must be stopped. This is a complicated crisis for the financial sector. In such an unstable situation, people would not get the confidence to send in remittance or foreign direct investment," Hussain added.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



A boat packed with freshly harvested winter vegetables entering the capital via the Buriganga from Munshiganj. Every year winter comes as a delight for food lovers as vegetables flood the city markets. Even all-season vegetables tend to drop in prices during this season. The photo was taken in the capital's Postogola yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT CELLS 'No one to listen until we make ourselves heard'

Univ students frustrated with inaction; many still unaware

NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

Mehnaz (not her real name), a student of Chittagong University, was sexually harassed by a group of men on her campus a few months ago.

She filed a complaint to the proctorial body in this regard, following which the perpetrators started threatening her and her family members.

"I was being pressured to withdraw the complaint as the perpetrators were backed by a leader of the ruling party's student body. They told me that nothing would come out of the complaint and only my character would be assassinated.

"I still went ahead with it and eventually, two of them were suspended."

However, when the time to file the complaint had come, she said no one mentioned that she could go to the anti-sexual harassment cell and ask for protection.

"At that time, I didn't even know it exists."

That is the reality of the anti-sexual harassment cells at the universities, despite a 2009 High Court directive that requires active cells in all educational institutions and workplaces.

A vast majority of students do not have the good fortune of seeing their perpetrators getting punished as Mehnaz did.

This newspaper talked to 115 students from 15 public and private universities across the country, where almost all of them mentioned they have been victims of some form of sexual harassment or know someone who is a victim.

Most of them have said they are not comfortable with filing complaints because they fear their identities will be revealed and they will have to face repercussions, which stands against a fundamental function of the cell -- protecting the victims.

According to the information gathered from the students, around 46.1 percent of the harassers were classmates of the victims, whereas 27.8 percent were seniors/juniors, 11.3 percent were outsiders and 10.4 percent were faculty members.

Of those interviewed, 63.5 percent mentioned incidents of physical harassment, while 75.7 percent mentioned instances of verbal abuse and 29.6 percent reported cyber harassment.

Meanwhile, 61.7 percent of them said no complaint was filed regarding the incidents. Of the rest, only 3.2 percent could file a complaint to their university's anti-sexual harassment cell.

The HC entrusted the University Grants Commission (UGC) with overseeing the formation of committees at the universities.

Contacted, Mauli Azad, deputy director of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

How prehistoric humans survived winter revealed

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Prehistoric humans living in northern Europe over 300,000 years ago used bear skin to survive the harsh winters, a new study reveals.

The study, published recently in the Journal of Human Evolution, examined traces on bones from the archaeological site of Schöningen in Lower Saxony and found cut marks on the foot and toe bone remains of a cave bear discovered at the stone age site.

Researchers, including those from the University of Tübingen in Germany, say the new findings are one of the oldest evidence of this type in the world from early human ancestors, who were still not likely bearing all the same anatomical features as modern people.

"These newly discovered cut marks are an indication that about 300,000

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4