



Afghan security personnel inspect a site following a suicide attack in Kabul yesterday. A suicide bomber on a motorbike blew himself up near a convoy of gunmen commemorating the death anniversary of a famed resistance leader in Kabul, killing at least seven people. PHOTO: AFP

Trump not on the midterms ballot but looms large

AFP, Washington

His name will not be on the ballot, but President Donald Trump will be there in spirit when Americans vote in mid-term elections in November.

And the results will set the tone for the remaining two years of the presidency of the man who will be on everybody's mind.

Americans will vote nationwide on November 6 for the first time since the New York real estate tycoon pulled off one of the most stunning upsets in US political history.

Former president Barack Obama put Trump front and center in the opening salvo in a series of campaign stops Friday, accusing him of "capitalizing" on "fear and anger."

"What happened to the Republican Party?" Obama asked, taking off the gloves after nearly two years of avoiding direct criticism of his successor.

All 435 seats in the House of Representatives are up for grabs along with 35 seats in the 100-member Senate and the posts of governor in around 30 states.

Republicans currently hold majorities in both the House and the Senate. Democrats are hoping that a "blue wave" will propel them to victory in the House and the latest polls give them a good chance of doing so.

Seizing control for the Senate looks less likely.

In a Washington Post/ABC News poll of registered voters, 52 percent said they favored the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate in their district. Thirty-eight percent said they favored the Republican.

As for the economy -- often a harbinger for the ruling party's fortunes -- 58 percent said it was "excellent" or "good" with 38 percent saying it was "not so good."

Unemployment is currently at an 18-year low at 3.9 percent while gross domestic product grew 4.2 percent in the second quarter.

Despite the bright economic numbers, the "Grand Old Party" is struggling in large part because of the unpopularity of Trump himself.

The president -- whose time in office has been marked by frequent turmoil -- has been hit by an especially bruising week, with an anonymous op-ed alleging that members of his administration were seeking to frustrate his "worst inclinations" and head off disaster for the country.

That account was corroborated by investigative journalist Bob Woodward's new book, which describes a coalition of like-minded aides plotting to prevent the president from destroying the world trade system, undermining national security and sparking wars.

Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, said that while Democrats are "soft favorites" to take the House, fortunes could change.

"Unforeseen events could wipe out their prospects before Election Day," Sabato said. "I don't expect that to happen, but the Trump era is tumultuous."

Midterm elections are traditionally

difficult for the party in the White House as the president tries to respond quickly to the often unrealistic demands of the electorate.

Two years after Obama's election, Democrats suffered a bruising mid-terms defeat amid a bitter debate over health care reform.

Only once since Harry Truman was president has the party in the White House picked up seats in the House during a first term -- in 2002, in a United States which was still suffering the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

For many, the midterm vote is being seen as a referendum on Trump, whose style and personality sharply divides Americans.

"The top three issues are Trump, Trump, and Trump," said Sabato. "Since Trump is at 40 percent or so in the polls, this can't be good news for Republicans."

Trump in recent weeks has been trying to galvanize his base, holding high-energy campaign rallies in a bid to create a "red wave" of his own.

The president plans to step up campaigning in the next few weeks including a visit to Texas to support Senator Ted Cruz, once his bitter rival for the Republican presidential nomination.

Trump is well aware that a hostile Congress could severely limit his ability to get anything done during his remaining two years in office.

If Democrats take over the House, they could seize upon the various scandals surrounding his presidency and tie up his administration with myriad committee investigations.

Whatever the result in the congressional midterms, on November 7, Americans will begin looking to the next big election -- the November 3, 2020 presidential vote.

Trump, who will be 74-years-old by that time, has already rolled out his campaign slogan: "Keep America Great."

His Democratic challenger has not yet emerged and a fierce battle is expected to see who will carry the banner.

Trump, for his part, is feeling confident.

Five people found dead in Perth

REUTERS, Sydney

Australian police found up to five dead people including a woman and children yesterday in a suburb of the western city of Perth, a senior officer said.

"This is early and we've not yet fully examined the scene. We understand that there are adults and children involved," Western Australia Police Assistant Commissioner Paul Steel told a news conference.

Steel said up to five bodies had been found at the scene when police arrived at noon. Investigators were still there.

"I can say there was at least one woman but I can't say more than that I'm afraid. The scene has not yet been forensically examined so the exact number of adults and children is actually unknown to me," Steel said.

No ICBM in N Korea

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since World War Two.

A huge float was decorated with a modern train, solar panels, wind power plants and dams, under a slogan of "All our might to build economy!", as North Korean men in construction work wear marched.

Kim Yong Nam, North Korea's titular head of state, gave a speech at the parade in which he said the country had achieved status as a military power, and would now pursue efforts to strengthen its economy.

Floats on unification also passed by a throng of North Koreans waving unified Korea flags.

"All Koreans should join forces to accomplish unification in our generation. Unification is the only way Koreans can survive," said an editorial in North Korea's party newspaper Rodong Sinmun.

Kim Jong Un and his South Korean counterpart Moon will meet in Pyongyang on September 18-20 for the third time this year and discuss "practical measures" towards denuclearisation, officials in Seoul have said.

KIM'S LETTER Despite stalled progress on talks with Washington, the North Korean leader wants to denuclearise the peninsula within Trump's first term, according to South Korean officials.

Trump said on Friday that Kim has sent a letter to him, which he believes will be positive.

Melissa Hanham, a senior research associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies said the military component of the parade appeared to be scaled

down this year.

"I am very curious to hear what is in the letter to Trump, because this parade could have been more provocative," Hanham said, adding satellite evidence showed North Korea continued missile-related activities such as testing solid fuel motors.

Kim was seen laughing and holding hands up with the Chinese special envoy as he oversaw the festivities at Pyongyang's main Kim Il Sung square on a clear autumn day. Kim waved to the crowd before leaving but did not make any public remarks.

North Korea has invited a large group of foreign journalists to cover a military parade and other events to mark the 70th anniversary of its founding.

That includes iconic mass games that Pyongyang is organising for the first time in five years, a huge, nationalist pageant performed by up to 100,000 people in one of the world's largest stadiums.

Both the Mass Games and the military parade have been criticised by human rights advocates and North Korean defectors for the pressure placed on performers and for painting a distorted picture of the country through stage-managed displays.

But thousands of jovial North Koreans clapped in unison and rallied support for their leader Kim.

A concert on Saturday night attended by Kim Yong Nam and foreign delegations featured little in the way of martial messaging or images, with only a few shadowy American bombers shown briefly in footage of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Hurricane Florence takes aim at US East Coast

REUTERS, Miami

Florence is likely to surge back to hurricane strength and take aim for the US East Coast later yesterday as it churned across the mid-Atlantic with winds of 70 miles per hour towards the US East Coast, where it is expected to make landfall mid-week.

And another storm, Tropical Storm Isaac spinning farther out in the Atlantic could also become a hurricane by today as it gains strength, forecasters with the National Hurricane Center (NHC) in Miami said in an advisory early yesterday.

With an eye on Florence, governors in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina have declared states of emergency, warning residents to prepare for a dangerous storm.

Recovery

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officials to remain alert so that no individual or quarter deteriorate law and order spreading fake news and rumours using social media.

He hoped that they would be able to help in holding a good election with the efforts of all.

Chaired by the police chief, the meeting was attended by commissioners of all metropolitan cities, deputy inspector generals of all ranges, superintendents of police of all districts, chiefs of all police units in Dhaka and high officials of the PHQ.

The IGP praised efforts of the police force for their achievement in curbing the menace of militancy in Bangladesh and said: "The emergence of militancy is now under control and we will have to continue the effort against the militancy."

About enforcement of traffic rules, he said no violators would be spared, even in the case of a member of the police. "Stern action will be taken against all violators."

The IGP also asked police superintendents across the country to take measures so that people could celebrate the Ashura and Durga Puja smoothly.

The meeting reviewed the crime situation of January-June when 1,14,124 cases were filed across the country.

'Drug peddler'

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were about to meet there to share a stash of drugs including yaba pills, a team led by senior ASP Alamgir Rahman went to the spot around 1:30am.

"Sensing police presence, the alleged drug peddlers threw Molotov cocktails and opened fire on them, forcing the police team to retaliate," OC said.

At the end of the fire exchange, police recovered five bombs, two machetes, 450 yaba tablets -- 350 on Mahbubur's body and 100 on Zakaria's body.

Mahbub was sent to Bogra Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

During that "fight", sub-inspector Abu Rayhan and police constable Nure Alam were injured. They are under treatment at Bogra Police Lines Hospital, said the OC.

Razzak said three cases have been filed against five people in this regard, one narcotics-control case, one for the attack on police and another for possession of explosives.

12 students 'picked up'

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As per the law, any detained person needs to be produced before a court within 24 hours of their detention.

The 12 "detained students" are -- Saifullah, Al Amin, Jahirul Islam Hasib, Mujahidul Islam, Jahangir Alam, Gazi M Borhan Uddin, Tarek Aziz, Mahfuz, Raihanul Abedin, Iftekhar Alam, Tarek Aziz and Mehedi Hasan Rajib.

"Police officials sometimes give assurances [that they are in custody] but sometimes they deny picking them up. We came to know from those who were released that our children are being tortured and are confined to the DB office... We are in fear about the fate of our children," said Mansur Rahman, father of Saifullah.

"Sifat was tortured less than others and yet his narration of agony was horrifying," he said, quoting Sifat.

More than two dozen students were picked up from different messes during raids at different points in Mohakhali and Tejgaon on Wednesday.

The DB officials allegedly quizzed them about the quota movement and student protests for road safety, several family members told reporters at the briefing, quoting those released.

Contacted, some police officials kept mum on the issue while DB Additional Commissioner Abdul Baten could not be reached for comments as he did not receive any calls to his phone.

Meanwhile, Mansur claimed that his son Saifullah lived in Modhupur in Tangail with his family but started staying in Sifat's mess in Mohakhali after Eid to attend the training sessions of a pharmaceutical company he had recently joined.

"Saifullah was in Tangail during both movements and he was in no way involved."

"We are deeply concerned as we do not know what is going on... whether our sons have been killed or they are still

alive," said another guardian.

Enamul Haque, a guardian, told reporters in the briefing that his son Jahirul was staying in a mess at Tejgunipara and was taking coaching lessons for Dhaka University admission tests.

"He was picked up on Wednesday. I went to the DB office several times. Sometimes they said they had him in custody and sometimes they denied it. We are in fear and uncertainty."

He added that he had not been able to meet his son since he was picked up.

Rashed Alam, brother of another detainee, Iftekhar, arrived in the city from Noakhali after being informed of his brother's detention by Iftekhar's neighbours. He still does not know for sure how or where his brother is.

"Produce him before the court if he has committed a crime or release him otherwise," he appealed.

Rafiqul Islam, father of Raihanul, could not hold back his tears when others were demanding a safe return of their sons.

"Please ask them to release him as I toiled a lot for my son," requested Rafiqul, a driver by profession.

The family members requested human rights organisations to be vocal against the confinement of their dear ones.

Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist, said, "Law enforcers are dodging the law to produce detainees before a court within 24 hours showing various excuses. This is against the law and action must be taken against those who practice it."

He added that this practice has increased among some members of the law enforcers and unless it was stopped immediately, the public would lose faith in them.

Around 150 persons, mostly students were arrested by police centring recent quota and student movement. Most of them were released on bail before Eid.

Start probe now

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will be published and presented to the Human Rights Council on September 18.

Welcoming the ICC's Thursday rule that it has jurisdiction over alleged deportations of Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh, he said, "The decision is a light in what has been a very dark episode for the Rohingyas this past year."

Legal experts have said the decision at the Hague-based ICC paves the way for prosecutor Bensouda to further examine whether there is sufficient evidence to file charges in the case, though she has not done so yet.

Dieng said deportation can constitute a crime against humanity under international law. The chamber also ruled that the court would have jurisdiction over other crimes committed, such as the crime of persecution, if at least one element of the crimes within the jurisdiction of the court -- or part of such a crime -- has been committed on the territory of a state party to the statute.

The decision followed a request by the prosecutor of the ICC on April 9, 2018, in which the prosecutor sought a ruling from the Pre-Trial Chamber on the jurisdiction of the court in a situation in which persons are deported from the territory of a state which is not party to the Rome Statute of the ICC into the territory of a state which is a party to the statute. While Myanmar is not a party to the statute, Bangladesh is.

Accordingly, the decision opens the door to the prosecution of some of the crimes that may have been committed against the Rohingyas, the special adviser added.

"The crimes allegedly committed or initiated in Myanmar against the Rohingya population, particularly since August 2017, which led to the mass displacement of almost a million Rohingya people into Bangladesh, are horrific and must not go unpunished," insisted Dieng.

"We have all heard the shocking reports of mass killings, the gang rape of women, of babies being thrown into fires, and the complete destruction of villages. The failure of the Security Council to refer the situation to the ICC for investigation, despite credible information to support these allegations and numerous calls for accountability, has been frustrating, to say the least."

Dieng also noted that while the decision issued by the ICC is a breakthrough, alleged crimes perpetrated solely on the territory of Myanmar, including conduct that could possibly amount to the crime of genocide, will be excluded from the jurisdiction of the ICC.

For that reason, the special adviser, who visited Bangladesh on March 7-13 to assess the situation of Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar following incidents of violence in October 2016 and August 2017, urged the international community to continue its efforts to bring justice to the Rohingyas.

His visit focused on what lies ahead for the Rohingya population; how to ensure that the crimes committed against them are not repeated; and how to hold accountable those responsible for the crimes that have been documented.

Nigeria claims 'normalcy restored' after Boko Haram attack

AFP, Abuja

Nigeria's military yesterday said it had restored order after Boko Haram fighters took control of a town in the country's remote north-east, sparking fears about the group's resurgence.

Scores of jihadists believed to be loyal to a faction backed by the Islamic State group overran troops in Gudumbali on Friday, according to local officials and security sources.

At least eight civilians were thought to have been killed and thousands more forced to flee, in what was the Islamist extremists' first major seizure of a town in two years.

It also followed a series of deadly attacks on troops, which have called into question repeated government and military claims that Boko Haram is weakened to the point of defeat.

Nigerian Army spokesman Brigadier General Texas Chukwu, who on Saturday said he was "not aware" of the attack, yesterday confirmed the incident.

"The encounter took place when the insurgents attacked the community, set some buildings ablaze and quickly withdrew from the community," he said in a statement.

"However, no human casualty was recorded in the encounter. The troops have regrouped and normalcy has been restored. The troops have also been reinforced with additional troops to dominate the general area."

Nigeria's military regularly trumpets its apparent successes against Boko Haram and has strongly denied previous reports of army casualties in attacks.

There was no independent verification of Chukwu's claim, as access to areas outside the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, is tightly controlled by the military.

Nine years of conflict, which has claimed at least 20,000 lives in northeast Nigeria, has also destroyed telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas.

Padma bridge

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Fifty nine percent work of the main bridge and 36.5 percent of the river training have been completed.

According to the first revision of the project in 2011, the work was scheduled to be completed in 2015. Later, the deadline was extended to 2018.

As per the last revision in January 2016, the total project cost was Tk 28,793 crore. The government in June this year approved additional Tk 1,400 crore for the project taking the total project cost to Tk 30,193 crore.

According to a Bridges Division proposal, a feasibility study on the project was conducted with assistance from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) during 2003 to 2005.

The original cost was estimated in 2007 on the basis of the study. However, it did not include the cost of railway lines on the bridge.

With financing from the Asian Development Bank, the work on a detailed design of the bridge had started in 2009.

The project cost almost doubled to Tk 20,507 crore when the first revision was done in 2011.