

Putin steps up push for influence in Africa

REUTERS, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin stepped up Russia's push for influence in Africa days before he hosts a summit with African leaders, saying yesterday that Moscow can offer help without political conditions unlike what he cast as the exploitative West.

The Kremlin has said it expects 47 African leaders to converge on the Black Sea city of Sochi for the October 23-24 event, Moscow's first Russia-Africa summit and part of an ambitious push for influence and business in Africa.

Putin yesterday gave the clearest idea yet of his pitch to African countries, warning of rising competition over Africa and accusing the West of intimidating African countries to exploit their resources.

2 top leaders

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and illegal gambling last month. Sheikh Maruf, also the brother of AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, was barred from entering the Gono Bhaban on Sunday when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held a meeting with the top leaders of Jubo League, the AL's youth front.

Molla Abu Kawser is also the president of Dhaka Wanderers Club, which is among the clubs that had been closed on charges of running illegal casinos.

The Central Intelligence Cell of the NBR yesterday asked banks to freeze and furnish information of accounts of Maruf's P24 Gaming Company Ltd and P24 Law Firm Ltd, and Kawser's Fine Power Solutions Ltd.

The NBR last week asked banks to freeze the accounts of recently removed Jubo League president Omar Faruk, his wife, three sons and two business entities: Lake View Properties and RAO Construction Ltd.

The NBR had earlier froze the bank accounts of Dhaka North City Corporation ward councillors Tarequzzaman Rajib and Habibur Rahman Mizan and Jubo League leader Anisur Rahman, his wife and two business entities: Ma Filling Station and Arefin Enterprise.

Nearly two dozen people had their bank accounts frozen and had been facing investigations since the government launched the drive.

BNP lawmaker

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Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of Dhaka's Special Judge Court-4 handed down the verdict in the presence of Harun after rejecting his bail plea, while the other two are on the run.

The punishment of the fugitives will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, the judge said.

After cross-examination of all 12 prosecution witnesses, the judge handed down the sentences. He also gave directives that said Enayet's vehicle should be handed over to the government. Judge Shaikh Nazmul also said the period during which the accused were in custody prior to the conviction shall be deducted from the period of their jail terms.

Sub-Inspector Md Yunus Ali of Tejgaon police station filed the case against them with Pallabi police station on March 17, 2007.

According to the prosecution, it was alleged that MP Harun bought a Hummer Jeep on April 25, 2005, using his duty-free facilities and sold it to Istiaq, violating his bond made to parliament that he would use it for at least three years before handing it over to anyone else.

Istiaq later sold it to Enayet. During the army-led caretaker government, all the three were arrested on charges of the offences and later they were released on bail.

Man's body

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College Hospital morgue for an autopsy, OC Shaker said, adding that a murder case was lodged with Kotwali Police Station.

Earlier, police had the area cordoned off for about 14 hours since Sunday evening, suspecting there might be explosives inside the bag.

On Sunday morning, traffic policemen on duty noticed the red suitcase with no apparent owner at a CNG refuelling station on the approach road to Shambhuganj bridge around 11:00am.

Noting the luggage was still there until evening, traffic police informed the matter to Kotwali Police Station and a team of police rushed to the spot around 7:00pm.

Youth lands

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locals rushed to the scene and rescued her. But Prodig fled the scene, the police official said quoting the case statement.

Police arrested Prodig in the evening after her brother filed a case. A court recorded the woman's statement and sent Prodig to jail yesterday.

Road safety remains as elusive as ever

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got their fitness certificated renewed in two months.

"We think a very few out of the 4.79 lakh unfit vehicles renewed their fitness certificates before the deadline. Among the 89,269 vehicles are those which might have renewed their certificates before their expiry," a BRTA official said.

He said many among the 4.79 lakh vehicles might not be running now.

A total of 41.76 lakh vehicles, including 27.54 motorcycles, got registered with the BRTA till September this year since the country's independence.

As per the law, all vehicles but motorcycles must have their fitness checked and certificates renewed by the BRTA every year. Therefore, 14.22 lakh vehicles are required to have their fitness certificates renewed annually.

But the BRTA data shows that only 5.75 lakh vehicles renewed their fitness certificates in the last fiscal year. A total of 1.40 lakh received fitness clearance in the first three months of the current fiscal year.

People involved in the transport sector said there are several lakh unregistered vehicles in the country.

Mahbub-E-Rabbani, director (road safety) of BRTA, said their mobile courts conduct drives regularly against unfit vehicles and police also work on the issue.

"Problems arose due to a huge number of unfit vehicles, but we are trying our best to check plying of such vehicles," he told this correspondent yesterday.

NUMBER OF ROAD CRASHES RISING

Although some government officials claimed to have taken different steps to cut the number of road accidents, the numbers of road crashes and

casualties are on the rise.

At least 3,488 people were killed and 5,863 others injured in 3,131 road crashes till October 18 this year, according to the Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet.

Some 4,076 people were killed in 3,513 road crashes last year, up from 3,672 deaths from 2,917 road accidents in the previous year, says an ARI report, prepared based on media reports.

Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passengers' welfare organisation, put the figure much higher.

Although official figures are significantly lower than that of the two organisations, they also show that the number is on the rise.

According to police, 2,635 people were killed in 2,609 road crashes last year, up from 2,513 deaths in 2,562 accidents in the previous year.

Experts and road safety campaigners said it would be impossible to achieve the target of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to cut the number of deaths from road accidents by 50 percent by next year, given the present road network and safety measures.

Asked about the rise in the number of road accidents, Rabbani, also the BRTA spokesperson, said the number of road crashes has increased as the numbers of population and vehicles went up.

He, however, claimed that the rate of road crashes decreased compared to the previous years.

TASKFORCE NOT YET OPERATIONAL

Amid growing concern over road crashes, a committee was formed in February to make recommendations on cutting the number road crashes and bringing discipline in the road transport sector.

The committee, led by former shipping minister Shajahan Khan,

on April 28 submitted its report with a 111-point recommendation. Subsequently, the government on September 5 formed a "high level" taskforce to implement the recommendations.

But the taskforce, led by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, is yet to start its work.

As per the proposal of the Shajahan Khan-led committee, 50 recommendations fall under category of "works to be done immediately", which are supposed to be done by December this year.

Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam yesterday said the taskforce would start working "very soon" as it got approval from the Cabinet Division on October 15.

NEW LAW NOT IN FORCE

The country witnessed a massive student agitation for safe road after the death of two college students in the capital in July last year.

Following the protest, the parliament passed Road Transport Act-2018 in September last year, aiming to ensure road safety. But the government did not issue any gazette making the law operative, as stipulated by the law.

Meanwhile, different transport organisations have been demanding amendments to several sections of the law, including making all offences under the law "bailable".

Several media reports said the government was going to amend the law giving into the pressure of transport leaders. However, the road transport minister said the information was not correct.

Asked about the delay in implementing the law, the road transport and highway division secretary said the prime minister would give directives in this regard.

UK PM denied new Brexit deal vote

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The European Parliament will not vote to ratify the new Brexit withdrawal deal until the British legislative chamber has done so, officials said yesterday.

This would mean it is unlikely that MEPs will back the deal this week while the European Parliament sits in Strasbourg and they will need to hold a special session later in Brussels.

'TECHNICAL EXTENSION'

Britain has been struggling to agree on how to leave the EU ever since narrowly backing Brexit in a 2016 referendum that did little to end old arguments about the country's place in the world.

Johnson has built his entire Brexit strategy on the premise of using the pressures of time to force everyone to stop bickering and agree an exit plan by the end of the month.

He ended up sending three letters to Brussels on Saturday night -- including an unsigned one to seek another extension.

The only one he actually signed said an "extension would damage the interests of the UK and our EU partners" and that he was firmly against a delay.

The manoeuvre is designed to

minimise the political damage of Johnson going back on his word and seeking an extension ahead of an early general election most expect in the coming months.

The top civil court in Scotland was due to hear a challenge yesterday on whether Johnson's half-hearted request broke the law.

But officials in Brussels said Johnson's request was valid.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he "would not rule out a short technical extension" if one was needed to get all the UK legislation approved.

The pound hit a fresh five-month peak above \$1.30 on renewed optimism that Britain could avoid the chaotic "no-deal Brexit" option that businesses and the markets fear most.

CUSTOMS UNION PLOT

The focus now switches on the government's attempt today to get lawmakers to support domestic legislation in the accompanying Withdrawal Agreement Bill.

Success or failure then would set the course for the coming week and largely determine whether Johnson's will get his October 31 divorce.

But the deck against Johnson seems stacked.

The main opposition Labour Party

is trying to create a cross-party alliance that would back Johnson's deal on the condition that it is fixed to keep Britain in a customs union with the EU.

Johnson and his supporters say this would kill the point of Brexit by keeping Britain tied to Europe and unable to strike its own trade deals with powers such as China and the United States.

Labour is trying to create a quick marriage of convenience with Johnson's nominal allies in Northern Ireland's headline Democratic Unionist Party.

The DUP broke ranks and voted against Johnson's agreement Saturday because it created new trade regulations for goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

A customs union would avoid that. The Brexit-supporting DUP appeared open to the suggestion after rejecting another amendment backed by Labour that would put up any eventual deal for a confirmatory referendum.

Hundreds of thousands of people rallied in London on Saturday demanding a second national vote on Brexit that could overturn the results of the 2016 referendum.

30 mummies in wooden coffins

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The discovery was unveiled in front of Hatshepsut Temple at Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

Egyptian Minister of Antiquities Khaled El-Enany described the 3,000-year-old coffins, which were buried in Al-Asasif Cemetery, as "exceptionally well-preserved, exceptionally well-coloured."

They contained the mummified remains of men and women, as well as two children, who are believed to be from the middle class, Waziri said.

While the mummies were found completely wrapped in cloth, their genders could be identified by the shape of the hands on the coffin. Coffins which were carved with the hands open meant they were female, while if the hands were balled into

fists, they held males, according to Waziri.

According to archaeologist Zahi Hawass, finding coffins belonging to a child is a rare occurrence. The discovery of two have caused tremendous interest "worldwide," he said.

The coffins were sealed, stacked on top of each other and arranged in two rows about three feet below the sand, he said.

They are adorned with intricate carvings and designs, including Egyptian deities, hieroglyphics and scenes from the Book of the Dead, a series of spells that enabled the soul to navigate the afterlife. Names of the dead were also carved onto some of the coffins, Hawass said.

The inscriptions are especially unique because of the vivid colours,

which stayed intact even though the coffins were buried for thousands of years. This is because ancient Egyptians used natural colours from stones, such as limestone, red oak, and turquoise, mixed with egg whites, according to Waziri.

After painting, egg yolk was mixed with candle wax and spread over the coffin to maintain a natural shine, which is still visible, he said.

Officials said the first coffin was discovered because its head was partially exposed. When they continued to dig, 17 more coffins were found. After those coffins were excavated, the archaeologists discovered an additional 12.

The cache of coffins was most likely hidden to keep tomb robbers away from them, according to Waziri.

Scarred by horrors of hate crimes

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my father still faced this cruelty," said Sunanda.

A traumatised Sreemoy, seven-year-old granddaughter of Anju, was seen crying in her grandmother's arms. The little one was still worried about further attacks, said Anju.

In the incident, many of the Hindu families fled to their Muslim neighbours' houses. Many of the

Muslims in the locality had come forward to help them.

The Hindu families were able to return home hours later and spent the night in fear. The male members of the families guarded the locality, fearing further attacks.

HSC examinee Supti Dey said she spent the night holding her mother and did not go to college yesterday.

Like her, no school and college going children of Hindu families went to their classes yesterday and the day before.

Sujon Chandra Dey alleged that attackers carried out the mayhem for about 45 minutes but police reached the spot half an hour after the attack.

Police were seen patrolling the area yesterday.

Lessons from Bhola

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is that police fired in retaliation. Even if we accept the police story in full, killing of four people and injuring of hundred others, almost inevitably, lead to the view that it was a case of overreaction. Of course, we, as armchair analysts, cannot know the real situation but still need to ask, couldn't the matter have been dealt with differently? Police know very well that those who organise agitation with a view to creating mob violence try, as part of their strategy, to instigate the police to force them to react - the more violently the better. The challenge is not to fall into that trap. Did we, in this case?

In this particular case there were two advantages that the police had - first, the incident started on Friday afternoon whereas the firing occurred on Sunday. This gave them ample time to prepare for any eventuality and second, police already knew that the Facebook account that was used to spread the hate messages was hacked proving that the whole thing was a setup. In fact, before the firing occurred police had already arrested the hackers.

Police did the right thing, and for which we commend them, by engaging with the local religious leaders and the Imams and diffusing the tension to a great extent. In the morning of the fateful day police officials again engaged with the religious leaders. When the situation was greatly diffused and calm appeared to have been restored, a highly charged group of agitators came onto the scene, incited the crowd to become violent and attacked the police officials, including the SP and additional DIG of the Barishal range, and other officials who had gathered in a nearby madrasa. The mob opened fire injuring a police constable and the retaliatory firing ensued, according to the police.

It would appear to us that when the vested group saw that police were able to calm the situation and realised that their aim to create a violent situation was being thwarted, it resorted to incitement that ended in the loss of four lives. It is a typical method mob inciters use and we should have been prepared for it.

What our law enforcers appear not to have factored in is the role of the people who were originally responsible for hacking the said FB account, putting in the fake messages and creating an abusive conversation, whose screen shots were then made and distributed widely. This group wouldn't let their well laid out effort fail just because of an intelligent police initiative and sensible reaction of the local religious leaders. And hence the violence, the attack on the police and the unfortunate deaths.

As of writing this commentary, police have done a commendable job of both containing further violence and protecting the religious group that has been targeted. The handling of the situation throughout Monday also deserves appreciation.

The troublemakers' obvious purpose was to belie our claim to be a highly tolerant country that celebrates its diversity of all types including and especially the religious. They have been at it for quite some time. We have seen similar attempts in Ramu in 2012, in Pabna (Sathiya) in 2013, in

Brahmanbaria (Nasir Nagar) in 2016, in Rangpur (Thakur para) in 2017 and now in Bhola (Borhanuddin).

The pattern in all the above cases is similar. A Facebook account of a religious minority person is hacked, a fake post against our religion and denigrating our Prophet is posted, which is then made viral, and in apparent retaliation a huge 'spontaneous' mob (in one case it was reported that participants in the rally were brought in by buses) gathers within a very short time that attacks places of worship of other religions and vandalises their properties. In the case of Ramu, several Buddhist temples reduced to ashes were historical treasures for Bangladesh.

We in the media, especially this newspaper, have always raised questions about the contrived nature of the so-called spontaneous outburst and the retaliation by a mob who appeared, in almost all cases, to suddenly appear out of nowhere in the shortest possible time and start indulging in violence.

A point needs to be made here that must be addressed immediately. A total of 36 cases were filed in the above instances (excluding the present one in Bhola) but most regrettably trial of not a single one has been completed. They are all at various stages of investigation, etc. There cannot be any acceptable explanation for this lack of police action. By not completing the cases the police gave, perhaps unwittingly, a message that prosecuting those attacking the minorities or vandalising their places of worship and properties was not the priority of our law enforcers.

Imagine if we had prosecuted all the criminals responsible for the attacks on minorities. We would have, at least, sent out a strong message against such actions. More than anyone else our law enforcers should know that when a crime goes unpunished it is not only that justice is being denied to the victim but also that other criminals are being encouraged to commit the same crimes. This must stop forthwith.

We echo our prime minister when she warns "not to try to cash in on the Bhola incident". We must all be ready and willing - and we are - to work alongside the government to create a tolerant and harmonious society for without a universal acceptance of our varied culture, diverse religious and ethnic heritage the Bangladesh of Liberation War will not be achieved.

But wishes and warnings are hardly enough.

To start with we must expose the fact that all the incidents so far of an individual from a minority community denigrating our religion were NOT TRUE. That they were done by vested quarters who wanted to destroy the fundamental ethos of Bangladesh and of our Liberation War which is tolerance of diversity and harmonious and peaceful co-existence of all groups. This means we must immediately, in the shortest time possible, complete investigation and finish all legal formalities to expose these vicious attempts to destroy Bangladesh of our dreams and punish the people behind all such actions.

We commended Sheikh Hasina in the past, and do so again, for holding the trial of our war criminals. We now urge her to make this our topmost priority of the moment.

Menon's tactic

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national elections with "boat", the polls symbol of the AL.

They alleged Menon got busy in achieving personal gains abusing his party and Jatiya Sangsad posts.

For instance, he worked to make his wife a lawmaker from the reserved seats for women in parliament, the insiders alleged.

Also, the Workers Party's central committee had decided to contest the parliamentary polls in 2008 with the party symbol "hammer". But Menon, a presidium member of the party, decided to vie the election with AL's "boat" symbol -- a move that goes against the Workers Party's charter.

In protest, a group of leaders, led by Haider Akbar Khan Rono, left the organisation.

Another group of leaders, led by Ragib Ashan Munna, Tusher Roy and Mojammel Haque Tara, also left the party after it decided to take part in the "one-sided" parliamentary elections held on January 5, 2014.

Now, the Workers Party is on the verge of another split as a section of leaders, led by the party's General Secretary and presidium member Bimol Bishwas, is also set to quit, said the insiders.

Bimol may make the announcement at the party's next congress, scheduled to be held on November 2-5 in Dhaka, they said.

Sources said Menon became vocal on several issues after he failed to get any spot in Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's current cabinet. He became even more vocal after discussions on his alleged involvement in illegal casino business came to light, the sources said.

Law enforcers are currently conducting a drive against illegal gambling and casinos, with the first one being at Fakirerpool Young Men's

Club in the capital on September 18. Menon is the chairman of the club's governing body.

Sources said some recent remarks by Menon made the ruling Awami League aggrieved.

At a programme in Gazipur on October 14, he alleged that around Tk 9 lakh crore had been siphoned off abroad.

Later at another programme in Barishal, he alleged that people could not vote in the December 30 parliamentary polls in 2018.

"Although I was elected in the election, I am testifying that people couldn't cast their votes in that election. They couldn't vote in the union parishad and upazila parishad polls," he said.

A day later, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader posed a question to Menon asking whether the Workers Party chief would have made such claim had he been a minister.

In such a situation, the Awami League is going to hold a meeting of its 4-party alliance, including the Workers Party, today at the AL central office on the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue. AL sources said the party leaders would ask the Workers Party to explain Menon's remarks.

Contacted, Menon yesterday told The Daily Star, "Ministership is not a big issue for me. I refused to take oath as a minister in 2015, but when Awami League faced political crisis I agreed to be a minister at the interim government for the continuation of the political process in the country."

Asked about Quader's remarks, he said, "Obaidul Quader's statement is nothing but an attempt to malign me."

Asked about Bimol Bishwas, the Workers Party boss said, "We may have indifferences over several issue, but he never expressed his desire to leave the party."

Explain why

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section 41 (1) of the Government Service Act-2018 should not be declared illegal and contradictory to the articles 26 (1) (2), 27 and 31 of the constitution.

The cabinet secretary, secretaries to the prime minister and president's offices, to the public administration and law ministries, and Speaker of

parliament were made respondents to the rule.

On October 14, three lawyers -- Sarwar Ahad Chowdhury, Eklas Uddin Bhuiya and Mahbubul Islam -- filed the petition on behalf of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh.

Manzill Murshid stood for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Saifuddin Khaled represented

the state.

The government issued a gazette notification of the law on November 14, 2018.

According to the section 41 (1) of the act, the authorities concerned have to take permission from the employer concerned or the government for arresting any government employee in criminal cases.