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MYANMAR COUP

Suu Kyi held as army takes over

Military reasons polls irregularities, declares state of emergency, pledges power transfer after new polls; Biden leads world's condemnation, orders sanctions review; UNSC to meet today

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military seized power in a bloodless coup yesterday, detaining democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and imposing a one-year state of emergency -- moves that sparked global outrage and calls for the generals to immediately backtrack.

The army intervention ended a decade of transition from outright military rule in Myanmar, with the generals justifying the power grab by alleging fraud in the November elections that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide.

US President Joe Biden led the chorus of world condemnation, calling for a quick restoration of democracy and warning that Washington could reimpose sanctions.

"The international community should come together in one voice to press the Burmese military to immediately relinquish the power they have seized," Biden said.

"The United States is taking note of those who stand with the people of Burma in this difficult hour," Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were detained in the capital Naypyidaw before dawn, party



spokesman Myo Nyunt told AFP, just hours before parliament was meant to reconvene for the first time since the elections.

Late yesterday, Myanmar state television announced the removal of 24 of Suu Kyi's ministers, and 11 new appointments.

Former foreign minister Wunna Maung Lwin, who served under ex-general Thein Sein, will return to that role after five years -- taking over a job that Suu Kyi had held while she was de facto national leader.

The military sealed off roads around the capital with armed troops, trucks and armoured personnel carriers. Military helicopters flew across the city.

A putsch had been expected for days, yet when it came it left Myanmar stunned -- with roads to its main international airport blocked and communications cut -- a country once more isolated from a world it only rejoined a decade ago.

"It's extremely upsetting -- I don't want the coup," said a 64-year-old Burmese man in Hlaing township, standing with a crowd outside a grocery stall.

The United Nations Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting on the situation for today.

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Soldiers stand guard on a street in Naypyidaw yesterday, after the military detained the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the country's president in a coup.

PHOTO: AFP

Agreement must be followed

It doesn't matter who is in power, FM says on Rohingya repatriation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Rohingya repatriation will not be affected by the military coup in Myanmar, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday.

"The agreement on Rohingya repatriation was signed with the Myanmar state, and it doesn't matter who is in power, the agreement must be followed," he told The Daily Star, hours after Myanmar military took control of the Southeast Asian country following the detention of de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians.

The move follows a landslide win by Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy (NLD) party in November election, which the army claims was marred by fraud.

The military coup raised concerns if Rohingya repatriation process would be hampered with the military in power, as repeated attempts of Rohingya repatriation failed, with the Rohingyas saying that the conditions in Rakhine state were not

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ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Is repatriation now up in the air?

PORIMOL PALMA

Rohingya repatriation would now depend on how the international community reacts to yesterday's coup, experts have said.

It has been more than three years since nearly 750,000 Rohingyas, who faced brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state, took shelter in Bangladesh. Despite global pressure, including a genocide case at the International Court of Justice, the Rohingya repatriation did not happen.

The pandemic and Myanmar's elections in November last year led to the delay in the joint meeting between the officials in Dhaka and Naypyidaw. However, early this year a tripartite meeting involving officials from Bangladesh, Myanmar and China was held, and Dhaka expressed optimism of beginning the repatriation in the second half of the year.

Now that the Myanmar military has taken control of the country and detained de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders of the National League of Democracy (NLD), which had a landslide victory in the November polls, the question is "would it affect the repatriation of the Rohingyas?"

Some experts say the repatriation process may slow down, while others argue that Myanmar military, which led the "genocidal acts" against the Rohingyas, will face more international pressure. They all agree, however, that the Rohingya repatriation would depend on how the global community reacts to the coup.

"I think Rohingya repatriation process will slow down because the military government will be more involved in its administrative and internal issues," said M Humayun Kabir, president at the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute and a former ambassador.

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Coup baffles analysts

AGENCIES

The coup d'état staged by military in Myanmar that prevented Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected party from taking power yesterday baffled many political analysts.

The coup returns the country to full military rule after a short experiment in quasi-democracy that began in 2011, when the military, which had been in power since 1962, implemented parliamentary elections and other reforms.

For the past five years, Suu Kyi and her once-banned National League for Democracy (NLD) party led the country after being elected in 2015 in the freest and fairest vote seen in 25 years. Yesterday morning, the party should have begun its second term in office after winning 83 percent of available seats in the 2020 election.

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While Indian and Bangladesh have addressed major issues including cross-border terrorism and land boundary and maritime disputes in the last few decades, they have enormous opportunities for further cooperation with several areas requiring more attention -- such as water sharing, border killings and Rohingya refugee crisis. Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami speaks at length in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Porimol Palma.

Points of frictions have narrowed

Indian envoy says on Dhaka-Delhi ties over the last 10 to 15 years

TDS: Bangladesh celebrates its Golden Jubilee of Independence, as well as diplomatic relations with India, this year. How do you evaluate Bangladesh's progress and the diplomatic relations between the two countries?



Doraiswami: First and foremost, the Independence of Bangladesh is the story of the Bangladeshis who basically fought the war. We assisted in it, but we must always remember that we supported the desire of the Bangladeshi people to assert their own identity. Secondly, we have a relationship of 50 years.

It was somewhat derailed after the assassination of Bangabandhu. With that direction of the relationship, it did not go as expected.

However, we have moved forward. There is recognition today in both countries and we believe broadly that it is in the fundamental national interests of both the countries to remain closest friends and partners. Our friendly relationship is by far the best thing that we can do to help our own countries grow. This people-centric friendship between the

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■ A STORY BASED ON THE INTERVIEW WILL BE PUBLISHED TOMORROW ON OUR BUSINESS PAGE ■

DEATH OF A UNIV STUDENT

Viscera report 'holds the clue'

Forensic experts suspect food poisoning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators were waiting for the viscera report to identify the cause of death of a female university student, whose father has accused five of her fellow students of raping her.

After conducting the autopsy yesterday, Prof AM Selim Reza, head of forensic medicine department at the capital's Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, told reporters that they suspect that the 21-year-old woman may have died due to food poisoning.

However, the actual reason can be known after getting the viscera chemical analysis, he added.

When asked, he said they did not primarily have any evidence of force or rape. They have sent the vaginal swab and DNA sample to lab to know whether she was raped.

The woman died at a private hospital on Sunday, a day after her father filed a rape case with Mohammadpur Police Station accusing five of her fellow students.

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Threatened, MP files GD against Gouripur mayor-elect

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A lawmaker from Mymensingh-3 lodged a general diary on Saturday against the new elected Gouripur Municipality mayor Syed Rafiqul Islam for allegedly threatening him.

Nazim Uddin Ahmed, the lawmaker of Gouripur constituency, filed the GD with Kotwali Police Station as Rafiqul "threatened the local lawmaker and his son with death" over political rivalry.

The municipality election was held that same day and Rafiqul, for the third consecutive time, was elected mayor. He contested as an independent candidate.

In the general diary, Nazim, also a freedom fighter, alleged that around 4:15pm on Saturday, the newly elected mayor called him (lawmaker) over phone and said, "You have ruined my life. I never forgive you. I will see

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Huge logs are stacked in front of a sawmill close to the Marine Drive at Fishery Ghat, Chattogram. They pose risks of accident as they might get dislodged and go on to the busy road. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

12 die drinking spurious liquor

DB arrests 6 for making counterfeit spirits

STAR REPORT

At least 12 people, including two students of a private university and three staffers of a media organisation, have died from allegedly consuming counterfeit alcohol in Dhaka and Bogura district over the last 48 hours.

Police said they are investigating the incidents. In Dhaka, around 41 employees of the media organisation went to a resort in Gazipur last Friday for an office tour, according to sources.

Some had alcoholic beverages and got sick. They returned to Dhaka for treatment, a team member, preferring anonymity, told The Daily Star.

After returning to Dhaka, many were hospitalised for poisoning. While undergoing treatment, two employees died on Sunday and another died yesterday, said the team member, who also received treatment after having the drinks.

Around 10 employees of the organisation are still undergoing treatment at different city hospitals and two are in the ICU, said another staffer.

"We are now providing blood samples to check the source of poisoning," he said.

Sources said they had collected alcohol from the city's Gulistan area.

Abu Aziz, officer-in-charge (Investigation) of Kafrul Police Station, told The Daily Star that they received a call about a private organisation employee, who got sick and died in a city hospital while undergoing treatment after returning to Dhaka from an office tour.

"We heard they had liquor and we are suspecting it was tainted. We sent the victim's body to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for autopsy," said the OC.

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