

No proposal made to US for bringing BNP to polls

Says Momen



UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has said no formal proposal was made to the US to bring the BNP to the election process, although the party's election boycott came up during his recent meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"We want all parties. More or less all parties join the polls. But there is a political party which publicly says it won't take part in the election," he told reporters at the foreign ministry on Thursday.

He said if anyone intentionally avoids polls, it indicates they are afraid of the people.

As the issue of the BNP's election boycott came up in his discussion with Blinken, the foreign minister told the US secretary of state that he (Blinken) can look into whether they can make the party join elections.

"Bring them [BNP] if you can. It was just like that. It was not that we placed any such proposal," Momen said.

The minister said Bangladesh has a "very solid and independent" Election Commission, and its democracy is "very transparent". "Every person in Bangladesh believes in democracy; it [election] is a festival here. We want all parties in elections."

Referring to his meeting with Blinken, Momen said, "They gave much respect to my delegation."

The minister also visited Japan, Palau and Singapore after wrapping up his trip to the US. "My entire trip was very positive," he said.



Students hold their paintings as they gather on the occasion of 'Earth Day' at a school in Amritsar, India yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Russia eyes bigger slice of Ukraine

Its military says offensive is for full control of Donbas, southern Ukraine; UN documents 'unlawful' killings

AFP, Zaporizhzhia

Russia yesterday said it intended a full-bore assault to carve out a sizeable slice of Ukraine, as the UN documented the killing of dozens of civilians in one town.

Ukraine's government, emboldened by a fresh influx of high-grade Western weaponry, said its beleaguered forces were still holding out inside a sprawling, seaside steelworks in the razed city of Mariupol.

The Kremlin has claimed the "liberation" of Mariupol, whose control is pivotal to its war plans nearly two months after President Vladimir Putin ordered the shock invasion of Russia's Western-leaning neighbour.

"Since the start of the second phase of the special operation... one of the tasks of the Russian army is to establish full control over the Donbas and southern Ukraine," Major General Rustam Minnekaev said.

"This will provide a land corridor to Crimea," he added, referring to the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Minnekaev's comments were the clearest articulation yet of Russia's goals in the invasion's "second phase", which was forced on the Kremlin after Ukraine's Western-

backed resistance around the capital Kyiv.

"The enemy's offensive operation in the south hinges on Mariupol. The enemy is trying to focus all its efforts on it," Ukrainian regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko told AFP.

Russia's defence ministry said it was ready for a ceasefire at Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant, to allow out hundreds of trapped civilians – but only if Ukraine's soldiers surrendered.

In a phone call to Putin, EU chief Charles Michel appealed for humanitarian access to Mariupol during the Orthodox Christian Easter this weekend.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had rejected a proposed truce, while Putin accused Kyiv of refusing to allow its troops to surrender in Mariupol.

Ukrainian officials had hoped to evacuate more civilians out of Mariupol yesterday, but called off the operation because of "insecurity" on the roads.

On Thursday, three school buses carrying evacuees arrived in the city of Zaporizhzhia after leaving Mariupol and crossing through Russian-held territory.

Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of

staff, dismissed the Russian military plan outlined by Minnekaev.

"We have our own scenarios to defend Ukraine and I would point out that plenty of Kremlin plans have already been ruined by the work of our army and our people," he said on social media.

Russia's change of strategic focus to southern and eastern Ukraine saw invading forces leave behind a trail of indiscriminate destruction and civilian bodies around Kyiv, including in the commuter town of Bucha.

A United Nations mission to Bucha documented "the unlawful killing, including by summary execution, of some 50 civilians there", the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said.

Its spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said Russian forces had "indiscriminately shelled and bombed populated areas, killing civilians and wrecking hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, actions that may amount to war crimes".

The UN mission was sent on April 9, a week after an AFP team found bodies of people dressed in civilian clothing lining the streets of Bucha, after the town had been under Russian occupation for over a month.

9 more lives

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4:00pm, its driver lost control over the steering. The tiller fell into the roadside ditch.

The driver and his two helpers died on the spot, said Amir Hossain, OC of Hatiye Police Station, quoting locals.

In Laxmipur, a woman died in a head-on collision between a CNG-run auto-rickshaw and a covered van in Ramganj upazila's Hazipur area yesterday noon.

The victim is Mahbuba Sultana, of Athakora village in the same upazila. She was a mother of two.

According to locals, Mahbuba attended the primary school teacher recruitment test at an examination centre in Laxmipur town.

After the examination, she was returning home riding on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw that collided head-on with a covered van coming from the opposite direction at Hazipur Jame Mosque area.

The collision left Mahbuba dead on the spot. Her father Mahbub Alam, who was also in the auto-rickshaw, and its driver were critically injured in the accident.

On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued the body.

Police seized the covered van. But its driver fled, said Mosharaf Hossain, sub-inspector of Ramganj Police Station.

Meanwhile, at least two motorcyclists were killed and another was injured in two separate road accidents in Faridpur's Bhanga upazila.

The dead are Sajib Biswas,

40, of Chardoutalpur village in Narail's Lohagara upazila, and Tuhin Mollah, 19, of Chumurdi village in Faridpur's Bhanga upazila.

Quoting locals, Saha Alam, sub-inspector of Bhanga Highway Police Station, said the first accident took place on Dhaka-Khulna Highway in Munchurabad area when an unidentified vehicle ran over the motorbike of Sajib Biswas around 6:00am yesterday.

Sajib died on the spot and another passenger of the motorbike was injured seriously. He was admitted to Faridpur Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital.

Another accident took place in Hashamdia area of Bhanga municipality around 12:00 noon yesterday when Tuhin Mollah's motorbike hit a truck.

He received serious injuries and was rushed to Faridpur Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital where on-duty doctors declared him dead, he said.

[Our correspondents from Moulvibazar, Noakhali and Faridpur contributed to the report.]

WHO 'strongly recommends' Pfizer's Covid pill

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization said yesterday it "strongly recommended" Pfizer's Covid-19 antiviral pill Paxlovid for patients with milder forms of the disease who were still at a high risk of hospitalisation.

BNP leader arrested

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including Mokbul, were accused of instigating the clashes.

Another 800 to 1,000 unidentified Dhaka College students and New Market traders and workers were also accused.

Many of the named accused in the case are current and former leaders of the BNP and its affiliated organisations, according to Mokbul and the opposition party.

Apart from Mokbul, police named Jahangir Hossain Patwary, former general secretary of the BNP New Market thana unit, Harun Hawlader, the unit's organising secretary, Shahidul Islam, former vice-president of the unit and others as accused in the case.

"Among other accused is Tipu, a former Chhatra Dal leader who has been living in London for 15 years and Jahangir [Hossain Patwary] runs his business in Gulistan," Mokbul claimed on Thursday.

The role of police has drawn criticism since the clashes.

In earlier instances where mob violence was involved, it has been seen that police pick up or arrest people from the spot in connection with an incident. In this case, it was different.

The names of the two employees of Mokbul's shops and three Dhaka College students were widely circulated in the media.

But police have not

mentioned their names in any of the cases.

After a programme at Rajarbagh yesterday, when a journalist asked Inspector General of Police (IGP) Benazir Ahmed if there was political motivation behind accusing the BNP leaders, he said, "I don't know."

The IGP said the incident in New Market area took place in front of everyone and action will be taken in this regard.

Benazir said apart from CCTV footage, journalists have footage on their cameras.

"Be patient, the police are investigating, action will be taken. There have been violations of law, there have been casualties," he said.

Meanwhile, a murder case was filed yesterday over the death of shopkeeper Morsalin, who died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Thursday after suffering injuries during Tuesday's clashes. His brother Nur Mohammad filed the case with the New Market Police Station accusing 100-150 unnamed people.

A total of four cases have been filed over the incident – two by police and two by the family members of the two victims killed in the clashes. Over 1,500 unnamed people were made accused in these cases.

The two murder cases will be investigated by the DB, said SM Qaiyum, OC of New Market Police Station. Asked whether they

have identified anyone in the murder of 19-year-old computer shop employee Nahid Hossain, DB Deputy Commissioner (Ramna Division) HM Azimul Haque told this newspaper that they were working on it and hopeful of informing the media soon.

Officials said that they have collected photos and footage and based on those they have identified some people.

Meanwhile, following two days of calm since the deadly clashes, customers have been flocking to shops in New Market area since yesterday morning.

Traders expect that the number of shoppers would increase as Eid-ul-Fitr is ahead.

"After the clashes, there is panic among many buyers. Maybe in a day or two it will become normal. We don't want any further problems here. We want to run business smoothly," said a shop owner at Chandrima Super Market.

Shazneen's 24th death anniversary today

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Shazneen, who was a grade-IX student of Scholastica School, was murdered on the night of April 23.

More than 19 years after the shocking incident, the convict in the Shazneen rape and murder case, Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, was hanged at Kashimpur High Security Prison in Gazipur in 2017.

A Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women

Tourism to see a turnaround

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Bandarban for around a week from May 5, he added.

Himel, manager of Aronok Holiday Resort in Rangamati, told this correspondent that all of their 11 cottages were booked from May 3 to May 9.

AIRLINES SEE GOOD TIMES
Ticket prices on Dhaka-Jashore and Dhaka-

Barishal routes have increased up to threefold due to high demand.

Demand for Dhaka-Saidpur and Dhaka-Rajshahi tickets is also high as it usually takes around 14 to 15 hours for holidaymakers to reach their destinations by road in the northern region.

US Bangla's Kamrul

said, "People who bought tickets one or two months ago, got the regular price."

Mesbah ul Islam, head of marketing and sales at Novoir, said ticket prices have gone up due to high demand.

"It is a norm in aviation sector that ticket prices shoot up when demand is high."

Vaccination drive

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second round of the campaign could not be held.

This year, a record number of diarrhoea patients have been admitted to the icddr,b.

The number of diarrhoea patients in a 24-hour period surpassed the 1,000-mark on March 16, for the first time in icddr,b's 60-year journey.

COVID VACCINATION
Zahid said the government is preparing for yearly vaccination of people against Covid.

"It is yet to be confirmed whether people need to be

vaccinated against Covid every year, but we are preparing for it," he said, adding that measures have been taken to produce vaccines for Covid and other diseases.

The minister said the government would need 13 crore Covid jabs to vaccinate as many people against the virus every year, but the World Health Organization has not yet made a call on this.

"We have achieved success in Covid vaccination. Now all vaccines will be produced at home."

Asked about the recent

report of Transparency International Bangladesh on an alleged discrepancy of around Tk 23,000 crore in coronavirus vaccine purchase and management, Zahid said he didn't know anything about it yet.

He said a total of 65,907 students took the entrance test for the BDS course this year in 26 centres across the country.

"There are 1,950 seats this year. Of them, 545 are in government colleges. On average, 34 students are vying for one seat," the minister added.

Snarl-up at Paturia causes sufferings

UNB, Manikganj

Hundreds of buses, cars and trucks remained stranded near Paturia Ghat yesterday afternoon due to the rush of homebound people ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Tailback was seen on the Paturia road since morning.

Sources at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) said over 700 vehicles, including buses, trucks and private vehicles were stranded at the Paturia Ghat, causing immense suffering to passengers.

Over 500 freight trucks and 200 other vehicles were also waiting to board the ferries.

Shah Nawaz, deputy general manager of BIWTC, said 17 ferries were operating on the route as Banalata and Rajnigandha ferries were out of order.

Drivers said the situation was likely to worsen over the upcoming days ahead of the festival.

21 new Covid cases reported

UNB, Dhaka

The Directorate General of Health Services has reported 21 new Covid cases and zero deaths for the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

The death toll remained unchanged at 29,127. Over the 24-hour period, 3,916 samples were tested across the country.

On Thursday, the number of infections was higher as 45 new cases were reported with zero death.

Speedboat sinks in Bay, one body recovered

UNB, Chattogram

The body of a six-year-old was recovered from the coast of Bay of Bengal in Urirchar area of Chattogram's Sandwip yesterday after a speedboat sank amid a storm on Wednesday.

Two other children were still missing in the incident.

Kiriti Ranjan Barua, station officer of Sandwip Fire Service and Civil Defence, said they recovered the body around 25km off Guptachhara ghat. "The body may be of one of the missing twin sisters Adifa and Aliva," he said.

On Wednesday, the speedboat with 20 passengers sank in the sea during a storm while heading towards Guptachhara ghat in Sandwip from Kumira in Sitakunda, said Zonal Commander of Coast Guard East Zone, Captain Kazi Shah Alam.

Immunisation programme reaches Bhasan Char

UNB, Dhaka

Rohingya children on Bhasan Char are receiving vaccinations through a routine childhood immunisation programme.

The programme, which aims to draw the world's attention to the millions of children still missing out on life-saving vaccines, comes just ahead of World Immunisation Week – celebrated every year in the last week of April.

Unicef is providing technical and financial assistance to Bangladesh in support of childhood immunisations on Bhasan Char, said the UN agency Thursday.