

Momen draws flak from party

Refuses to talk to journos

STAR REPORT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, who generally loves to talk to the media, avoided journalists yesterday as he was under pressure from Awami League leaders and facing criticism from opposition politicians and international relations analysts for his recent comments.

They say the statements are disgraceful and embarrassing for the country and politically damaging to the ruling party.

"No, I am not going to talk to you. You misinterpret my comments," Momen told reporters in front of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi-32 after paying respect to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He took part in a discussion near the museum, marking National Mourning Day.

Minutes before the foreign minister left around 1:00pm, AL Presidium Member Abdur Rahman MP told reporters that the foreign minister "didn't belong" to AL and so his statements didn't reflect the party's position.

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Jannat, wife of Sumon Sheikh who died in police custody at Hatirjheel Police Station yesterday, wailing on the ground in front of the police station as protesters gather around her. Sumon was arrested on charges of theft and died by suicide inside the police station. The family alleged that bribe was demanded and that he was tortured and framed.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

IMPORT OF 300 NON-ESSENTIALS

Tax hike on luxury items on the way

1 crore more family cards likely to be issued; fuel prices may be cut next month

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The government is expected to increase the duty and taxes on 300 non-essential and luxury items such as SUVs, mobile phones and home appliances as it looks to rein in imports and ease the pressure on foreign currency reserves.

Vehicles over 3,000CC, washing machines, air conditioners, refrigerators, home decorations, tiles and toys are on the list drafted by the commerce ministry following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's directive at a cabinet meeting on July 25 for necessary steps to discourage imports of luxury items.

The list, which also contains non-essential items that are manufactured locally, has been forwarded to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) for necessary action. The Daily Star has learnt from officials working on the matter.

The measure is likely to be discussed at a high-powered meeting today at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), convened to review the economic situation and challenges originating from the Ukraine war and the escalating inflation.

The issues of slashing fuel prices and distributing another one crore family card among poor households to enable them to purchase daily essentials at subsidised rates will also be discussed at the meeting.

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AUGUST 21 GRENADE ATTACK

Recounting the horror

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of leaders and activists of the then main opposition Awami League had turned up in front of the party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004, to protest against a series of blasts in Sylhet that had killed several people.



All hell broke loose there at 5:22pm, immediately after AL chief Sheikh Hasina just completed injecting vigour among party activists and there was a call for starting of march and there were grenade explosions one after another.

"I had barely completed my speech and was going to get down from the truck [that was used as the stage of the rally] when I heard a big bang and the next moment blood splashed on my body," said Sheikh Hasina.

"Mamun, a security guard, helped me sit on the truck while the other grenades started to explode one after another," she said at her residence, Sudha Sadan, while describing to the reporters on August 22, 2004, what she witnessed on that fateful day.

"In a few moments, leaders and security personnel formed a human shield around me and helped me get into my car. Then came bullets hitting my car one after another."

The grenades hurled at the rally are usually used by the army, the then opposition leader observed. Hasina said, "The plan was obviously designed to kill me. Gunshots aiming at my vehicle say so. The grace of Almighty Allah saved me..."

During the BNP Jamaat coalition government, this unprecedented grenade attack was carried out and party leaders and activists formed a human shield to protect Hasina.

Hasina narrowly escaped the grenade attacks carried out by militants with ear injuries, but at least 16 people were killed on that very day and 300, including top

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Living itself is now an ordeal

Survivors narrate struggle

RASHIDUL HASAN

Even though 18 years have passed, Mahbuba Parvin is still unable to put herself back together after the trauma she faced in the August 21 grenade attacks on a rally by the Awami League.

The attack had left over 24 people killed and 300 wounded. With over 1,800 splinters all over her body, including the head and kidneys, she has developed multiple health complications and has been battling severe mental health issues.

"All I can think of now is dying. I want to take my life as I can't live



with this unbearable pain and suffering any longer," Mahbuba, vice president, Dhaka City (North) Awami Svecchhasebok League, told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

After a few minutes of silence, she added, "Living itself has become an ordeal as I am constantly suffering from pain in my body. Despite this, at least we [all the victims of the attack] could get some mental peace if we could see execution of the verdict while we are still alive."

Expressing her dismay over the delay in executing the verdict of the grenade attack case, she further said, "As my health is deteriorating gradually, I don't know if I will be able to see the perpetrators get punished before I die."

In photos that were published in different media after the attacks, Mahbuba could be seen in a blood-stained shari, lying among the dead.

After the attack, she was first able to move after spending three days in coma and gained consciousness 25 days later.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina, the then opposition leader, narrowly escaped death with injuries to her right ear, while Ivy Rahman, wife of late president Zillur Rahman, was among those killed.

Now in her 60s, Nasima Ferdushe, one of the most unfortunate survivors of the deadly blast, said, she is among the few survivors who are still alive.

Nasima, vice president of Bangladesh Mohila Awami League, said,

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Man dies by suicide in police custody

Two Hatirjheel cops suspended; wife says victim tortured, framed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hours after arrest, a 25-year-old man died by suicide in Hatirjheel police custody yesterday.

The family alleged that police tried to frame Sumon Sheikh, a delivery person. They also tortured him, demanded bribe and that's why he died by suicide.

It also said police were negligent in keeping him safe and it won't receive the body until all cops involved were punished.

The incident sparked protests in front of the police station and the police had to resort to truncheon charge to disperse the agitating crowd.

The police refuted the allegations and showed journalists CCTV footage of Sumon dying by suicide inside the lockup.

Sumon was arrested at his East



Sumon Sheikh

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WB to give \$6.05b over next 3 years

Share of non-concessional loans increase

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The World Bank Group is scaling up its lending to Bangladesh in non-concessional terms by as much as three times to prepare the country for its impending LDC graduation, which would close the doors to low-cost funds.

At present, all the loans that Bangladesh gets from the Washington-based multilateral lender come from the International Development Association, its concessional lending arm for the world's poorest countries.

As the country's economic position improves, it graduates from IDA and into the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the WB arm that lends to middle-income countries at commercial rates.

IDA scales up the share of loans in IBRD terms as the country nears graduation to prepare for borrowing at market-based rates.

Bangladesh is now at that stage, which is a "blend" country in the WB's categorisation.

So in IDA20, the IDA's latest three-year lending programme starting from July 2022 and ending in June 2025, Bangladesh would be receiving \$6.05 billion, 33 percent of which would be on market-based rates. The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials.

In IDA19, where Bangladesh was the largest recipient country, 13.7 percent of the loans were on market-based rates. The country was officially informed last week of its share in IDA20, which began a year ahead of schedule after the global coronavirus pandemic depleted the previous pot in two years instead of three.

Of the record \$93 billion raised for IDA20, Bangladesh has been allocated 6.5 percent, while 39 African nations would be getting 70 percent of the pot.

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