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AL, BNP in overdrive to woo allies

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The ruling Awami League and its arch-rival the BNP are working to bring like-minded political parties into their fold ahead of the next parliamentary election.

As part of the move, the AL is trying to expand its alliance by taking the pro-liberation political forces on board. It is also taking steps to strengthen the 14-party alliance, insiders said.

The BNP, on the other hand, is focused on waging a simultaneous movement with all the opposition forces. It has begun talks with like-minded parties so they could join hands and realise the demand for a neutral polls-time administration, BNP leaders said.

Before the 2008 election, the AL formed a 14-party alliance with pro-liberation and left-leaning parties. At the same time, it formed a greater alliance including the Jatiya Party and participated in the polls.

After the 2018 election, the relations between the AL and its partners in the 14-party alliance deteriorated because of

the smaller parties' lack of representation in the government. Some of the allies were also vocal against the government on different issues.

The main opposition in parliament, the Jatiya Party, was an electoral partner of the AL in the elections held in 2008, 2014 and 2018.

The relations between the AL and JP have lately been strained as the former believes JP Chairman GM Quader has reached an understanding with the BNP leaders about a simultaneous anti-government movement, sources said.

Last month, Quader said his party did not belong to any alliance with the AL.

The ruling party is now working on its relations with the member parties of the 14-party combine and has already sat with them several times.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also had a meeting on March 15 with the partners of its "ideological alliance". Like the previous two elections, the AL will contest the 2024 national election under the banner of the 14-party alliance. The polls are slated for

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Traffic backed up for miles on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway near the airport after the rain yesterday morning. Construction work in the area has substantially narrowed the road, making congestion a common phenomenon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUSINESS

Exports fall after 13 months

Export earnings dropped 6.25 per cent year-on-year to \$3.9 billion in September, the first decline in 14 months, as the cost-of-living crisis in Western countries took its toll on Bangladesh's main foreign currency earning sector. The decline came as garment shipment, which accounts for about 85 per cent of national exports, went down by 7.52 per cent to \$3.16 billion in the month.

Exporters warned that the negative growth may continue for another one or two months because of the rundown inflation in Europe and the US.

STORY ON B1

Remittance lowest in seven months

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Despite a surge in the outflow of migrant workers, remittances to Bangladesh declined 11 per cent year-on-year to \$1.54 billion in September, the lowest in seven months.

Bankers say the uniform exchange rate fixed by banks for remittances, a move that has brought some stability to the foreign currency market, might have had a negative effect on the inflow of the cheapest source of US dollars for the country.

Banks on August 11 decided to pay a maximum of Tk 108 for each dollar to foreign exchange houses (like MoneyGram and Western Union). Prior to that, they had offered exchange houses up to Tk 115 for a dollar.

As per the decision, no bank offers more than Tk 108 for a dollar from foreign exchange houses and Tk 99 to buy the greenback from exporters.

The poor show in the remittance sector came despite 7.84 lakh migrant workers leaving the country for jobs abroad in the first eight months of 2022. The figure was 6.17 lakh in 2021 and 2.17 lakh in 2020.

Expatriate Bangladeshis usually send money to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through the exchange houses.

September's remittance figure was also a fall of 24.4 per cent from that in the preceding month. However, remittance was up 5 per cent year-on-year to \$5.67 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, which began in July.

The poor show in the remittance sector came despite 7.84 lakh migrant workers leaving the country for jobs abroad in the first eight months of 2022. The figure was 6.17 lakh in 2021 and 2.17 lakh in 2020, data from the Bureau of

Manpower Employment and Training showed.

A Bangladesh Bank official said the decline in remittances might intensify pressure on both the government and the central bank as the country is struggling to manage its macroeconomic stability

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PUJA MANDAPS Still haunted by last year's horrors

STAR REPORT

Bomb disposal squads, armed police protection, and repeated government assurances of a "peaceful" Durga Puja were there but the shadows of last year's traumatic puja descend like a chill on this year's festivities.

Even as the temples attacked last year have restructuring their fairy lights, reinstated their glittering idols, and devotees pray to the beat of dhaaks, some ghosts remain.

Last year's havoc began at the Durga Puja celebration of Nanua Dighir Par in Cumilla, and the first blow was felt by the idols in that mandap.

Shamol Saha, a resident of Nanua Dighir Par, said, "Last year the incident happened on the day of Ashtami. As the idols were vandalised and a mob of hundreds created anarchy, we decided not to complete the puja then."

The vandalised idols were immersed in Nanua Dighi.

The idols had been brought from Shri Shri Rajeshwari Kalibari, which has

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BCL run at the whim of Joy, Lekhak

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Bangladesh Chhatra League has been running its organisational activities in an "undemocratic" manner for the most part of the last four years, much to the dismay of its leaders and activists.

Ever since they became the president and general secretary of the central committee in 2019, Al Nahean Khan Joy and Lekhak Bhattacharjee have been making organisational decisions at whim and in violation of the charter, insiders said.

Aggrieved BCL leaders allege the democratic practices within the organisation have been pushed into the back seat as the top leaders are running the student body arbitrarily.

The organisation was not run like this in its golden years leading up to the 1971 Liberation War.

Joy and Lekhak did not respond to repeated calls and text messages for comments.

As per the BCL charter, the incumbent central committee must make preparations for holding a council to elect the next president and general secretary before its two-year tenure ends. But the current committee made no such move in the last four years.

The duo also failed to form committees in at least 67 out of the 116 district units within the stipulated one-year time. In some districts, councils are pending for over 10 years.

Barishal district unit, for example, was formed in 2011 and its tenure expired a decade ago. The tenure of the Dhaka University unit, one of

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INDONESIA FOOTBALL MATCH

125 dead in stampede

323 hurt as police fire teargas after fans invade field

REUTERS, Malang

A stampede at a football stadium in Indonesia has killed at least 125 people and injured more than 320 after police sought to quell violence on the field, authorities said yesterday, in one of the world's worst stadium disasters.

Officers fired teargas in an attempt to disperse agitated supporters of the losing home side who had invaded the field after the final whistle in Malang, East Java, on Saturday night, the region's police chief Nico Afinta told reporters.

"It had gotten anarchic. They started attacking officers, they damaged cars," Nico said, adding that the crush occurred when fans fled for an exit gate.

Some local officials had put the death toll at 174, but East Java Deputy Governor Emil Dardak said the number of fatalities had subsequently been revised down to 125.

The earlier figure may have included duplicate fatalities, he said. An East Java police spokesperson said 323 people were injured, up from the initial count of 180.

Video footage from local news channels showed fans streaming onto the field after Arema FC lost 3-2 to Persebaya Surabaya around 10:00 pm (1500 GMT), followed by scuffles, and what appeared to be clouds of tear gas and unconscious fans being carried out of the venue.

Many victims at the nearby Kanjuruhan hospital suffered from trauma, shortness of breath and a lack of

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Supporters evacuate a man hit by tear gas fired by police during the riot after the league BRI Liga 1 football match between Arema vs Persebaya at Kanjuruhan Stadium, Malang, East Java province, Indonesia, on Saturday night.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rohingya man killed in 'landmine explosion'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya man was killed as a "landmine exploded" in Myanmar territory close to Ghumdhum border in Bandarban when he went there to catch fish yesterday morning.

Omor Faruk, 27, was a resident of the Rohingya camp on no-man's-land near Tamburu area of Naikhongchhari upazila.

Jahangir Aziz, chairman of Ghumdhum union, said, "Crossing the border, Faruk went to a stream inside the Myanmar territory to catch fish. At that time, the landmine went off and he died on the spot."

Later, his body was brought back and buried, he added.

Over the past few weeks, Myanmar military reportedly continued its air and ground assaults against the Arakan Army, an ethnic armed organisation based in Rakhine State.

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