

Is Samrat back?

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Expelled Jubo League leader Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat, an alleged casino kingpin in Dhaka, seems to have become active in politics again centring the organisation's founding anniversary rally today.

The expelled president of the Jubo League's Dhaka Metropolitan South unit is planning to stage a "grand showdown" in the rally, his supporters said.

Earlier on August 22 this year, he was granted bail by the Supreme Court.

Samrat's followers have put up banners and festoons with his name and picture at various points across Dhaka South.

Samrat is also in regular contact with the leaders and workers, giving them instructions, they added.

This correspondent saw banners and festoons with Samrat's picture and name near the rally venue and in other areas of the capital, including Paltan, Motijheel, Gulistan, Kakrail, Chawkbazar, and Lalbagh.

An organising secretary of the Dhaka Metropolitan South Jubo League, wishing to be anonymous, told The Daily Star that around 50,000 leaders and activists will be on the field "under Samrat's leadership" today. The activists will also wear caps and t-shirts bearing his name and photos.

After the law enforcement agencies started the anti-casino drive in September 2019, Samrat's name came under the spotlight because of various allegations including tender rigging, extortion, corruption, and money.

On October 6, 2019, the Rapid Action Battalion detained Samrat and his associate Enamul Haque Arman from Chaudhagram, Cumilla.

The Rab raided his Kakrail office the next day and recovered large quantities of foreign liquor, pistols, and two kangaroo hides.

Abdul Khaleque, deputy assistant director of Rab-1, later lodged two complaints against Samrat with Ramna Police Station under the Arms Act and the Narcotics Control Act.

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PHOTO: ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Followers of expelled Jubo League leader Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat have put up banners and festoons with his name and photo at various places in the capital ahead of the organisation's rally today. The photo was taken at Doyel Chattar yesterday.

Ukraine's forces advance in south

Retake 12 settlements as Russia withdraws troops from Kherson

AGENCIES

Ukrainian troops advanced in the south yesterday after Moscow began one of the war's biggest retreats, though Kyiv remained publicly wary, warning that fleeing Russians could turn Kherson into a "city of death".

Ukraine's army chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi said Kyiv could not yet confirm whether Russia was indeed pulling out, but that Ukrainian troops had advanced 7 km in the past 24 hours and recaptured 12 settlements.

"We continue to conduct the offensive operation in line with our plan," he wrote in a post on Telegram.

A small group of Ukrainian soldiers was shown on Ukraine's state TV in the centre of the village of Snihurivka around 55 km north of Kherson city. They were greeted by dozens of residents in a square, with

a Ukrainian flag fluttering from a pole behind them.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday he was waiting to see how Russia's withdrawal from Kherson played out, but if confirmed, it would be "another victory for Ukraine".

Petro Lupan, a Ukrainian volunteer distributing bread to residents along a nearby stretch of the front line north of Kherson, told Reuters he had just learned of the recapture of Snihurivka from a friend reached by phone there. "I can't find words to describe my feelings," the 46-year-old said.

Moscow ordered its troops on Wednesday to withdraw from the entire Russian-held pocket on the west bank of the Dnipro River, including Kherson city, the only regional capital Russia had captured in nine months of war.

Ukrainian officials have so far mostly been wary in public, warning that Russians may still be planning to sow destruction on their way out.

Mykhail Volodymyr Zelensky, said yesterday Russia wanted to turn Kherson into a "city of death", mining everything from apartments to sewers and planning to shell the city from the other side of the river.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country is moving "very carefully" in response to Moscow's announcement.

Russia's retreat order, just over a month after President Vladimir Putin proclaimed the annexation of an area he said would be part of Russia forever, is one of the most humiliating defeats Moscow has suffered so far.

Govt borrowing from BB stokes inflation fears

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demand for goods, which, in turn, will push up the price level.

In October, non-food inflation, which accounts for 40 percent of overall inflation, maintained its rising trend and hit a new high of 9.58 percent.

Inflation averaged 8.75 percent in the first four months of the fiscal year -- a long way off the target of 5.6 percent set in fiscal 2022-23's budget. This has already sparked off a cost of living crisis in the country, hitting the poor and the middle class hard.

If the government maintains its current trend of borrowing from the central bank, non-food inflation and, in turn, inflation will spiral in the coming months.

There is no other option for the government but to take a loan from the central bank as commercial banks are now facing liquidity stress owing to the volatility in the foreign exchange market stemming from an acute dollar shortage, said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank.

"It is an alarming phenomenon for the economy that the government is now repaying its maturing loans from commercial banks by taking funds from the central bank," said a BB official on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

Of the sum taken by the

government from the BB, Tk 4,627 crore was used to repay commercial banks, so the government's net borrowing from the banking system during the period is Tk 23,751 crore.

"The government has never taken loans at a faster pace in recent years from the central bank," he added.

Governments around the world avoid borrowing excessively from the central bank as much as possible as it creates inflationary pressure, said Monzur Hossain, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

"The ongoing excessive borrowing from the BB is not logical as ordinary people have already been hit hard by high inflation," he said, while urging the government to explore borrowing from alternative sources like national savings instruments.

Net investment in savings tools nosedived to Tk 330 crore in the first three months of the fiscal year from Tk 8,558 crore a year earlier.

If required, the government should relax the rules and regulations for parking funds in savings certificates, Hossain added.

Mansur, who is also a former economist of the International Monetary Fund, advised the government to either amp up its revenue collection or pare down its expenditure to avoid turning to the

central bank.

The National Board of Revenue's first quarter receipts of Tk 67,124 crore missed the periodic target by 5.8 percent.

In September, revenue collection growth was 8 percent, in contrast to 20 percent a year earlier.

"It is now difficult for the majority of banks to finance the government as they are now in liquidity stress due to lower deposit growth," said Emranul Haq, managing director of Dhaka Huq.

In fiscal 2021-22, banks' deposit growth was 9.35 per cent in contrast to 13.80 per cent a year earlier.

Besides, a good number of banks are buying dollars from the central bank in exchange for the taka to clear their import bills amid the shortage of the greenback.

This fiscal year, BB has injected more than \$5 billion into the market after fiscal 2021-22's record injection of \$7.62 billion.

Banks are now struggling to manage deposits from individuals, which is why they are showing unwillingness to provide funds to the government, said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of the central bank.

In such a situation, the government should cut its less important expenditure to reduce its borrowing from the central bank.

Now BRTC buses join strike fray

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Mentionable, transport strikes were also called ahead of the BNP's recent rallies in Mymensingh, Khulna, Rangpur, and Barishal.

The party maintains that these strikes are part of an attempt by the ruling Awami League to keep BNP supporters from taking part in the rallies.

All central leaders and multiple ministers, however, denied the allegation, saying that the ruling party had nothing to do with the strikes as the transport associations are "independent".

According to media reports, almost all top leaders of the transport associations that called the strikes either belong to the ruling party or are supporters of its allies.

Meanwhile, keeping in mind that the transport strike in Faridpur starts today, BNP leaders and activists have started to arrive at the venue in droves to join the party's Saturday rally.

The programme is scheduled to be held at Abdul Aziz Institution ground in Komorpur area, around six km away from the district headquarters.

Visiting the venue yesterday evening, this correspondent found hundreds of BNP men from adjoining districts, including Rajbari and Shariatpur, have already reached the area.

Some were staying at the institution's two classrooms, while many were seen waiting in the corridors and ground.

Besides, some BNP men took shelter at houses near the venue.

"Some 700 leaders and activists of our party came here around 5:00pm today [Thursday], as bus operations will remain suspended from tomorrow," said Habibur Sheikh, 76, a BNP activist who came from Jalilpara village of Rajbari's Pangsha upazila.

Md Mahafuj Bepari, 21, another BNP activist, who came from Shariatpur's Damudya upazila, said they feared

they might face problems reaching Faridpur after the suspension of bus operations, and that's why they decided to reach the venue two days earlier.

Contacted, Syed Modarresh Ali, convener of Faridpur district BNP, said, "The strike has been called only to foil our rally. But thousands of people will join the rally defying all kinds of obstructions and harassments. Our programme will be a success."

On Wednesday, BNP leaders at a press conference in Faridpur alleged law enforcers were raiding the homes of party workers ahead of its rallies.

Police, however, denied the allegation.

The BNP will hold the rally in Faridpur tomorrow as part of its series of rallies in the divisional cities, protesting the price hike of essentials and fuel, recent killings of five party men in police firings and demanding release of its party chairperson Khaleda Zia.

No strings attached for first instalment

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GDP ratio, implementing the VAT law and setting up an asset management company to dispose of soured loans.

Bringing down the banking sector's default loans to within 10 percent and raising the capital adequacy ratio to the BASEL 3 requirement of 12.5 percent, periodically adjusting the fuel price, implementing the climate-related proposals made in the budget and on various international conferences and increasing remittance receipts through the formal channels are on the task list, according to Talukder.

Withdrawing the interest rate cap or cutting back on fertiliser subsidy and tax exemption were off the table, according to Kamal.

"The fact that IMF is with us will

dissipate the market's tension," another official said.

Meanwhile, the IMF staff mission wrapped up its 15-day tour of Bangladesh yesterday with a meeting with think tanks to exchange views and to hear their opinion on the economy.

The think tanks include the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI) and the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (Sanem).

"They are expecting the pressure on reserves to dissipate in 2-3 months," said one of the meeting participants on the condition of anonymity to describe a private conversation.

The next budget will be the key as the IMF will be watching if the government is being sincere about

the reforms, he added.

"They [the IMF staff mission] are hopeful that the programme will work," said another meeting participant.

The government's ownership is crucial here, said Selim Raihan, executive director Sanem.

"If there is ownership, proper reforms will happen and our structural problems can be addressed."

If the government can use the opportunity properly, the economy will become stronger and it will improve the capacity to absorb shocks, Raihan added.

"We are hopeful the programme with the IMF will be successful," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of PRI.

England demolish India

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Hales finished on 86 not out from 47 balls, and Buttler, who was unbeaten on a 49-ball 80, completed the statement win in style, blasting paceman Mohammed Shami over his head for six.

Put into bat after Buttler won the toss, Rohit Sharma's India started slowly under tight English bowling, and it was left to Hardik Pandya (63) and Virat Kohli (50) to mount a rescue, pushing them to 168 for six.

The total seemed a tad below par and soon looked piffling as Hales and Buttler went to work, the pair blasting 23 boundaries between them.

Their 170-run stand was the biggest opening partnership in T20 World Cup history and England's biggest for any wicket at the tournament.

For player-of-the-match Hales, it was a night of redemption, having missed out on England's 2019 triumph after a recreational drug scandal.

His exile from the England setup lasted more than three years and he was only called up to the squad after Jonny Bairstow was injured in a freak golf accident.

England had to make changes for the semi-final, with pace spearhead Mark Wood and number three batsman Dawid Malan out injured.

Replacement seamer Chris Jordan took 3-43, capturing the key wicket of Kohli, while spinner Adil Rashid took a miserly 1-20 from his four overs.

Virat Kohli made his fourth half-century of the tournament and put on a 61-run fourth-wicket stand with Pandya, who tore into the opposition attack in the final overs, taking 57 off the final three overs, including 20 off one from Sam Curran.

But it proved too little, too late, after a sluggish start with the bat.

Kohli passed 4,000 T20 international runs with a boundary off Liam Livingstone that took India's total to 100-3 after 15 overs.

What was his last known location?

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Meanwhile, Amatullah Bushra, a friend of the deceased, was placed on a five-day remand after she was arrested yesterday in a case filed by Fardin's father.

In the case, Kazi Noor Uddin Rana, the victim's father, accused her of instigating the murder.

Bushra's family members, however, claim she is innocent and has been framed in the case.

After the case was filed with Rampura Police Station around 3:00am, accusing Bushra and unnamed others, she was arrested in the morning and produced before a court with a seven-day remand prayer.

The court granted a five-day remand for interrogation.

According to the case statement, Fardin left his Demra home on November 4.

He had told his family he would be sitting an exam at the university on November 5 and would then return home to have lunch with his mother.

Fardin, however, never appeared for the exam. After learning this, Noor Uddin tried to reach his son over the phone but could not. Other family members and friends too tried to contact him but in vain, the case statement read.

Police said Bushra told them she and Fardin were together from afternoon till around 10:00pm on November 4.

An officer investigating the case said Fardin was seen on a rickshaw with Bushra in the capital's Rampura area around 10:00pm.

"But we still could not find any footage showing him [Fardin] leaving the area. That is what made us suspicious," he said, preferring anonymity.

The body of Fardin, a third-year student of civil engineering in Buet, was recovered from the Shitalakkhya at Banani Ghat in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj on November 7 afternoon.

His head and chest bore injury marks. Bushra, a third-year student of English at a private university, lives in a mess in the capital's Rampura.

Mazharul Azam, an uncle of hers, said she has been falsely implicated in the case.

Quoting Bushra, he said Fardin had come to Rampura TV bhaban area to drop Bushra. "She had been in the mess since then."

He added the CCTV footage even shows her walking towards the mess alone around 10 minutes after she was dropped.

In another development, the murder case was transferred to the Detective Branch of police yesterday for further investigation.

Man sentenced to 7-yr for 'hurting religious sentiments'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Rajshahi court yesterday sentenced a man to seven years of rigorous imprisonment in a case filed under the Information and Communications Technology Act.

He was also fined Tk 1 lakh, in default of which he will have to serve another three months in prison.

According to court sources, Sujon Mahanta, 37, son of Joypurhat's Panchbibi upazila, was sued for "hurting religious sentiments" after he posted a photo on Facebook on February 1, 2017.

He was arrested by Panchbibi police the same day.

Two arrested over BNP leader's murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday sent two men to jail for their involvement in a case filed over the murder of BNP leader AFM Kamal.

Accused Mishu, 26, of Badambagicha area, and Mona, 25, of Gowaipara area, were arrested by the Rab in Noakhali Bazar area in Sunamganj's Shantiganj upazila on Wednesday night. They were later handed over to the Sylhet airport police, said Afsan-Al-Alam, senior ASP (media officer) of Rab 9.

AFM Kamal, former health affairs secretary of Sylhet district BNP, was stabbed to death on Sunday in the district town's Barabazar area.

Police had earlier arrested Aziz Hasan Kitu, one of the accused, after the victim's brother Moynul Haque filed a case with the Airport Police Station against 10 named and around five unnamed people on Tuesday.

Fisherman drowns in Chapainawabganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Fire service officials yesterday found the body of a fisherman, who had gone missing earlier that day in the Mahananda river in Chapainawabganj town's Baroghoria area.

Shukuddi, 65, son of Attab Ali of Jamadar para in the town, slipped into the river around 6:00am when he was fishing and drowned, said Alamgir Jahan, officer in-charge of Sadar Model Police Station.

Upon information, a fire service team went to the spot and recovered the body around 10:00am, the OC added.

The body was handed over to the family without an autopsy upon their request.