

‘Apologise for 1971 atrocities’

Momen tells Pakistan FM in Colombo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said Pakistan should formally apologise to Bangladesh for the atrocities it unleashed on the unarmed Bangalees in 1971.

He said this at a meeting with Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar on the sidelines of Sri Lanka’s 75th Independence Day celebrations in Colombo, according to a press release by Bangladesh foreign ministry.

Indian State Minister for External Affairs Shri V Muraleedharan also called on Momen. They discussed issues of bilateral interests, including trade and commerce.

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe conveyed his gratitude to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government for its timely assistance in Sri Lanka’s economic recovery.

RAMPAL POWER PLANT It’s an example of Dhaka-Delhi partnership Says Indian envoy

UNB, DHAKA

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma yesterday said the Rampal power plant is a concrete manifestation of the deep-rooted friendship and cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

“Energy cooperation is an important component of the India-Bangladesh development partnership and the power plant is a concrete manifestation of the deep-rooted friendship and cooperation between India and Bangladesh,” he added.

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Pranay Verma



Palestinians check the damage in a house which was destroyed by Israeli troops during a military raid in Jericho, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Western allies pledge more weapons to Kyiv

France, Italy to send missile systems; EU agrees price cap on Russian petroleum products

AFP, Kyiv

Western allies pledged precision rockets and missile systems to Ukraine on Friday, after President Volodymyr Zelensky called for sophisticated weapons to help retain control of the embattled eastern city of Bakhmut.

Meanwhile, the European Union agreed to introduce price caps on Russian petroleum products to try to further limit Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war chest by targeting his key exports.

The announcements came shortly after Zelensky told a summit with EU leaders in Kyiv: “No one will surrender Bakhmut. We will fight as long as we can.

“If weapon (deliveries) are accelerated – namely long-range weapons – we will not only not withdraw from Bakhmut, we will

begin to de-occupy Donbas,” he said of the eastern region of Ukraine.

The United States on Friday announced a new \$2.2 billion package of arms and munitions, which the Pentagon said included a new rocket-propelled precision bomb that could nearly double Kyiv’s strike range against Russian forces.

The ground-launched small-diameter bombs (GLSDB), which can fly up to 150 kilometres (93 miles), could threaten key Russian supply lines, arms depots and air bases far behind the front lines.

They potentially give Kyiv’s forces the ability to strike anywhere in the Russian-occupied Donbas, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as the northern part of occupied Crimea.

However, “the delivery of the GLSDB likely won’t be for several months due

to contracting, production, and delivery timelines”, said Pentagon spokesman Lt Col Garron Garn, declining to say how many would be delivered.

France and Italy will deliver mobile surface-to-air missile systems, the French defence ministry said, in response to an urgent request from Kyiv to help protect “civilian populations and infrastructure from Russian air attacks”.

The systems, called MAMBA or SAMP, are a vehicle-mounted battery of medium-range missiles designed to offer protection from airborne threats such as missiles and manned or unmanned aircraft.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov, who had requested the weapons, tweeted his gratitude, saying the systems would “help us save thousands of lives” from Russian attacks.

Weak banking sector, the Achilles’ heel of economy

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To reduce bank balance sheet weaknesses, particularly of the state-owned commercial banks (SoCBs), the government will pursue bank-specific resolutions.

BB is developing an enforceable Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to reduce the average NPL ratio to below 10 percent for SoCBs and below 5 percent for private commercial banks (PCBs) by 2026.

These MoUs will also aim to increase capital adequacy ratios and provisioning coverages of SoCBs to 10 percent and 100 percent and of PCBs to 10 percent and 100 percent by 2026.

To strengthen the corporate governance of SoCBs, a committee is examining the existing policy for nomination and appointment of directors of SoCBs to suggest policy recommendations.

Further strengthening monitoring and supervision of the banking sector is needed to enhance financial sector resilience, the IMF staff report said.

“Structural weaknesses in supervision, regulation and governance, coupled with high NPLs and low capital in SoCBs, could be

a drag on medium-term growth prospects,” it said.

Steps will be taken to improve the stability, soundness and reach of the financial system, anchored by clear oversight responsibilities, strong risk-based supervision (RBS), and proper managerial and operational controls.

RBS will be adopted by 2025, while BB will complete the pilot RBS action plan by finalising the assessment of the three pilot banks, including one Islamic bank, by June.

Developing a macroprudential strategy and conducting scenario-based macroprudential stress tests would help manage systemic risk, the IMF staff report said.

The government will also strengthen credit infrastructure and collateral valuation framework.

Furthermore, the government plans to expand the mandate of the credit information bureau (CIB), allowing it to share data with private borrowers.

The government plans to submit to the parliament the Bank Companies (Amendment) Act 2020 and the Finance Companies Act 2020, drafted in line with best practices by the end of September and the Bankruptcy

(Amendment) Act 2020 and the Money Loan Court (Amendment) Act 2003 by June 2024, and the Negotiable Instrument (Amendment) Act 2020 by June 2025.

These reforms will help modernise the financial sector, improve the legal environment of credit and business activities, enhance the insolvency regime and facilitate recovery of loans, the IMF staff report said.

The government also committed to strengthening governance and combating corruption as part of the \$4.7 billion loan programme.

Moving toward international best practices for risk-based supervision would help further strengthen the AML/CFT framework and mitigate substantial money laundering (ML) risks, including from cross-border activity and trade-based ML.

The Companies Act will be amended to facilitate the information collection for fully identifying the ultimate beneficial ownership in the financial sector.

“We remain committed to combat corruption by safeguarding the independence of the Anti Corruption Commission,” said Kamal and Talukder.

Godfather of highwaymen

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Moin said.

On Friday, Rab arrested four members of the racket including Shahed, in Moulvibazar, Gopalganj and Dhaka.

Rab said a shipment to Brazil was among those from which Shahed’s gang stole RMG products.

Garment manufacturer A Plus Sweater Ltd had sent a consignment of sweaters worth over \$125,000, packed in 898 cartons to Chattogram Port from its Gazipur factory in eight lorries on October 29 last year, to be shipped to one of Brazil’s leading retail brands.

But A Plus Sweaters authorities were dumbfounded after receiving videos from the Brazilian buyer on January 6, which showed that some cartons were completely empty while a substantial amount of goods were missing from many others.

Law enforcers then started conducting an investigation into the theft.

Moin said Shahed is the “godfather” in the RMG theft racket. Most RMG thefts in Bangladesh take place under Shahed’s umbrella and with his consent. Shahed is accused in 17-18 cases of RMG theft filed with various police stations.

Trial proceedings of six of the cases are going on, he added.

The racket of 40-50 members includes drivers, helpers, warehouse owners, influential people in the areas where the warehouses are located, porters and a group of labourers, said the Rab official.

The other arrestees are Imarat Hossain Sajal, a stock lot trader of RMG products in the capital’s Uttara who bought the stolen goods, and driver Shahjahan and helper Hridoy, who were involved in about a hundred thefts, Rab said.

Moin said the gang members initially developed friendships with drivers and helpers of other lorries involved in transporting RMG goods and encouraged them to steal products.

Before each theft took place, the drivers took samples of the products to determine the potential sale price of the stolen goods. They would carry out the theft only if the value of the loot was estimated to be Tk 12-15 lakh, the Rab official said.

From this amount, the driver got Tk 30,000, the helper Tk 20,000, the warehouse owner Tk 50,000, local influentials Tk 60,000, carton packaging expert Tk 10,000, and other labourers Tk 2,000-3,000 each. The rest of the money was distributed among other groups according to their position, Moin said.

After the driver and helper took

the lorries with the RMG products to the designated warehouse, other members of the gang would cut the cartons and take the garment products. They would steal 30-35 percent of the contents of each carton, reseal the carton and quickly load them into a lorries that left for the port.

Later, other members of the gang would store the stolen goods in their own pickups or lorries in another warehouse for a month or one-and-a-half months. When the consignment left the country from the port, they sold the stolen goods to various unscrupulous buying houses, including the one in Uttara in the capital.

Earlier, on December 23, a team of Rab-4 raided a warehouse in Demra and arrested seven members of the gang.

On September 17, 2021, Shahed was arrested for theft of RMG products, which caused a stir among RMG exporters and in media. After his arrest, DMP Additional Commissioner AKM Hafiz Akhter at a press briefing said Shahed was the godfather of highway theft gangs who stole RMG goods from 5,000 consignments.

But, after a few days, Shahed was released on bail and went back to business as usual, Rab said.

BNP goes for fresh protests

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forward to overthrow the government.

Meanwhile at a separate rally, the new 12-party alliance, including National Unity Front, National Democratic Unity Front, Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote, ALDP, Gono Forum, and People’s Party, announced its own march on the same date.

Fakhrul said the election cannot be fair under this government and it was proven yet again in the latest by-elections.

“We saw how helpless the government was to a candidate like Hero Alam. The government had to employ the state machinery to defeat him by 600-700 votes.”

He added that an opponent candidate in the Brahmanbaria-2 polls was “forced to disappear” to ensure the “government candidate” Abdul Sattar’s win.

About the price hike of the commodities, he said the people have been struggling to cope.

“The government is destroying the people’s future. They are taking loans for development ... That money

is laundered to Canada, London and Malaysia to build ‘second homes’. Why do the people have to repay the loan and bear the burden?”

About the underground metro rail, he said that this project will cost Tk 52,000 crore. In contrast, the government has stopped paying allowances to the poor.

“The government is trying to turn the country into a failed state,” he said.

During the rally yesterday, vehicular movement came to a halt and many commuters were seen leaving their vehicles to move on foot.

Abdus Salam, convener of BNP Dhaka South, presided over the programme.

Meanwhile in Chattogram, a clash broke out between two factions of the BNP in front of senior leaders during its divisional rally. However, no casualties were reported.

The incident took place around 2:30pm in front of the party office at Nasiman Bhaban in Kazir Dewri area.

The two groups engaged into two

more clashes later.

However, police intervened and detained a person. He was later released after senior leaders said it was “all a mistake”, said Jahedul Kabir, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Thousands of leaders and activists from different districts of Chattogram thronged the venue since morning.

The Chattogram divisional rally, presided over by the division’s BNP Convener Shahadat Hossain, began around 2:00pm. Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan was present as the chief guest, while the party’s Vice President Abdullah AL Noman was the key speaker.

In Jhenidah, BNP leaders and activists alleged they were beaten up by AL men in Kaliganj upazila while they were on their way to the divisional rally venue in Khulna yesterday. The AL men allegedly also vandalised buses and minibuses carrying opposition activists at Bara Bazar around 10:30am.

Debt repayment may become a headache

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Bangladesh, for example, was tempted to commit a significant portion of its reserves to project funding, forgetting that reserves should not be treated as budgetary resources, but only as a cushion for unforeseen external shocks,” said the former adviser to the caretaker government at the session.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, also spoke at the event.

“We should be aware of another miscalculation. Even though the current debt-to-GDP ratio may not have crossed the red line, a debt repayment crisis may be in the offing, if there are too many mega-infrastructure projects being taken up through foreign funding without an understanding of whether such projects will attract enough private investment especially in export-oriented industries.”

He observed, however, that a mega project, once started, needs to be completed in time because delays in implementation come at a cost to the economy.

“Mega projects need very careful scrutiny in terms of timing, financial commitments, cost recovery and prioritisation.”

Taking up projects just because they look “prestigious” irrespective of priorities and future debt financing obligation is simply not the way to go, he said.

The International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) prescriptions are often not informed by country-specific situations.

The IMF usually recommends aligning domestic fuel prices with the global price. But very sharp and sudden hikes in domestic fuel prices may lead to price hikes across the board, he said, referring to the price hike of fuel in Bangladesh amid existing inflationary pressure on the economy.

The problem is more serious in Bangladesh as the government has to rely heavily on taxes on fuel for revenue purposes.

“A universal intermediate input like fuel should not be a major source of VAT revenue collection. If VAT on fuel could be waived, there would have been hardly any need for last year’s sudden fuel price hike in Bangladesh.”

A weak financial system is always a problem for economic management, he said, but it is much more so at times of economic shocks.

A serious problem is that a weakly governed financial system is unable to prevent illegal capital flight abroad that is likely to take place at times of economic uncertainty.

“The overall lesson here is that there is a need for an active, capable and pragmatic government with sufficient institutional capabilities. To absorb shocks, and ensure a soft landing, the coping policies have to be clever and

Child killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A five-year-old boy was killed in a road accident in Dinaipur’s Nawabganj yesterday.

The victim is Tahmid Islam, son of Touhidul Islam, of the district’s Khansama upazila, said police.

The father was riding his motorcycle with his wife and son on the pillion. He lost control over the vehicle at one point and hit a roadside sand pile, said Ferdous Wahid, officer-in-charge of Nawabganj Police Station.

The child died on the spot and the duo received serious injuries, the OC added.

Woman killed in attack over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A woman was killed and her husband injured as a group of criminals attacked them with sharp weapons over a land dispute in Dinaipur’s Ghoraghat yesterday.

The dead is Amena Begum, 45, wife of Sekendar Ali, of Baropaikar village in the upazila, said police, adding that Sekendar was admitted to Ghoraghat Upazila Health Complex.

According to police, one Montu Mia hired goons and attacked the duo after they started working on the land yesterday morning.

Locals then rescued the duo and took them to the health complex where doctors declared Sekendar dead, said Abu Hasan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Ghoraghat Police Station.

The body was sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for autopsy, he added.

At least 41 dead in Nigeria after gunmen, vigilantes clash

REUTERS

At least 41 people were killed when gunmen clashed with a vigilante group in Nigeria’s northern Katsina state, the home state of President Muhammadu Buhari, a police spokesperson said on Friday, the latest violence ahead of a presidential vote.

Insecurity has become widespread and a major concern for voters ahead of a Feb. 25 election to choose new members of parliament and a successor to Buhari, a former military ruler who came to power eight years ago promising to end insecurity.

Katsina state police spokesperson Gambo Isah said an armed gang, known locally as bandits, attacked a village in Katsina’s Bakori local government area, rustled cattle and sheep and fled into the bush.