

Dhaka, Delhi happy with existing ties

Momen, Jaishankar meet on G20 sidelines, discuss bilateral issues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Dhaka and New Delhi yesterday expressed satisfaction with the existing relations between the two countries as Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen met India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in New Delhi.

Momen and Jaishankar also discussed bilateral issues, said a press release issued by the Bangladesh High Commission.

Momen, who was in Delhi to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting congratulated Jaishankar for the successful completion of the event, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Jaishankar in a tweet reiterated India's neighbourhood-first policy.

"So nice to meet FM Dr Abdul Momen of Bangladesh on #G20FMM and #RaisinaDialogue2023 sidelines. Neighbourhood First, always," Jaishankar wrote.

Earlier yesterday, Momen held separate bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of Brazil, Mexico, Slovenia, and Sweden, the press release said, adding issues of mutual interest were discussed during the meetings.

Momen "sought active support from countries in addressing the Rohingya crisis, including through their early repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar," the release said.

"They also exchanged views on the ongoing geopolitical issues and enhancing multilateral cooperation, including in the UN.

The foreign minister of Mexico told Momen that Mexico would open their

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A Ukrainian serviceman fires a Msta-B howitzer towards Russian positions, near the frontline town of Bakhmut on Thursday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Bakhmut ‘practically surrounded’

Says Russian mercenary boss; Ukraine confirms situation there ‘critical’

REUTERS, Chasiv Yar

Russian troops and mercenaries rained artillery on the last access route to the besieged Ukrainian city of Bakhmut yesterday, bringing Moscow closer to its first major victory in half a year after the bloodiest fighting of the war.

The head of Russia's Wagner private army said the city, which has been blasted to ruins, was now almost completely surrounded, with only one road still open for Ukraine's troops.

Reuters observed intense Russian shelling of routes leading west out of Bakhmut, an apparent attempt to block Ukrainian forces' access in and out of the city. A bridge in the

adjacent town of Khromove was damaged by Russian tank shelling.

Ukrainian soldiers were working to repair damaged roads and more troops were heading towards the frontline in a sign that Ukraine was not yet ready to give up the city. To the west, Ukrainians were digging new trenches for defensive positions.

Victory in Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of about 70,000, would give Russia the first major prize of a costly winter offensive, after it called up hundreds of thousands of reservists last year. It says it would be a stepping stone to capturing the surrounding Donbas region, an important

war aim.

Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin, appearing in combat uniform in a video that Reuters determined was filmed on a rooftop in a village 7 km (4.3 miles) north of the centre of Bakhmut, called on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to order a retreat from Bakhmut to save his soldiers' lives.

The commander of a Ukrainian drone unit active in Bakhmut, Robert Brovdi who goes by the name "Madyar", said in a video posted on social media that his unit had been ordered by the military to withdraw immediately. He said he had been fighting there for 110 days.

‘Picked up’ 6 years back, no trace yet

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on the road and went to see what was going on. I saw police and the four detained men," said Akter Mia, one of the witnesses.

As the policemen were taking them to Bashgari Police Outpost on foot, local AL leader Shahed Sarkar, along with some followers, approached the officers and requested them to release the four.

As the policemen refused to free them, Shahed's supporters stopped them and started chanting slogans. The law enforcers opened fire and fatally shot a man named Mustafa.

The police team then took the four men to the outpost in Bashgari. A violent clash between locals and police took place near the outpost.

The other 12 witnesses also gave similar accounts of the events. One of them is an employee of Raipura Bhumii Office.

Following the clash, he and an official went to the Bashgari area in a microbus to enquire about the incident.

While returning to Raipura town from Bashgari, he saw a police pick-up taking the four men to Syedabad Ferry Ghat from Bashgari outpost, he said, adding that OC Azharul was in the pickup. "When our microbus crossed the Pagla river, the police vehicle was still at the ferry ghat."

He said that he clearly recognised the four men, known in the area as

political activists, at the ferry ghat. "One of the policemen told us that they detained the four men from a boat in Rajnagar area."

"The time was around 6:30pm and it was drizzling. The detained men were wearing helmets and bullet-proof vests," he said, requesting not to be named.

At a rally in Raipura on February 11, 2018, local lawmaker Raziuddin Raju said, "Where are big leaders like Rup Mia? Police know how they had swallowed them."

A footage of his speech went viral on social media at that time. Several newspapers ran reports on his speech.

When he was asked about what happened to the men, he said, "A clash took place after Rup Mia and others first attacked the police with spears. I do not know what happened later."

Asked about his comment, he denied saying such things.

He added that he was willing to help the families find out if the missing men became victims of enforced disappearance. "But none of them ever contacted me."

However, Rup's wife Nasima Begum and Azizul's elder brother Horun Mia said family members of each of the victims met Raju at his office and sought his help.

'POLICE ACCOUNT FALSE'
A day after the clash, Sub-Inspector

Raijul Alam filed a case accusing 23 named and 200 to 300 unnamed people of attacking police.

The complaint said while a police team was taking Rup to Bashgari outpost, his supporters attacked with firearms, crude bombs and sharp weapons and snatched him away from custody.

The case mentioned names of several witnesses.

But two of them, Aminul Islam alias Khokon Doctor and Abdus Samad, told The Daily Star that they were not present at the scene and they did not even know that police made them witnesses to the incident.

Both of them said they were in Raipura town, around 6km away from the scene, at the time.

Aminul, who now lives in the US, said naming him as a witness was wrong and it was false.

Abdus Samad said he returned home from the town at night and heard that police picked up the four men.

FAMILIES IN DISTRESS

Azizul's elder brother Horun Mia and Rup's nephew Moyeen Uddin alleged that police detained them and shot them in the leg a few months after the incident.

Police then falsely accused them of carrying firearms and narcotics, they added.

Harun and Moyeen said their legs had to be amputated.

2 killed, 30 hurt as Islamists clash with cops

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Sadar upazila. The programme was scheduled to begin at noon.

But leaders and activists of several Islamist organisations, including the Islamic Andolon Bangladesh, were staging demonstrations since Thursday demanding cancellation of the event.

After Juma prayers yesterday, they gathered at the town's Chowrangi intersection, brought out a procession and started marching towards the venue.

The clash ensued as police obstructed the procession. The agitators hurled brick chips at the law enforcers, and in retaliation, police charged batons and fired teargas shells.

At one stage, the mob took position surrounding Panchagarh

Sadar Police Station and hurled brick chips targeting police around 3:30pm, said Akhterul Islam, assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of the police station.

Two vehicles -- one of police and another of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) -- were damaged. The protesters also vandalised and torched a traffic police office in Dhakkamara area, said locals and police.

Besides, the agitators blocked the Korotoa Bridge, the main entrance to the town, around 4:00pm. It caused public suffering as traffic remained halted for around one and a half hours.

Around 5:30pm, the protesters marched again to Ahmednagar, an area on the town's south-eastern part where Ahmadiyya community

people reside, and vandalised 30 houses and four shops.

"As we came under attack, we were compelled to stop our programme," said Mahmud Ahmed, a member of the Ahmadiyya community.

Contacted, Md Abdullah, general secretary of Panchagarh unit of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, denied their involvement in the arson and said his party men were not involved in the incident.

COPS HURT, BGB DEPLOYED

At least seven policemen were injured during the violence, said the district's police chief, SM Sirajul Huda, around 8:00pm.

Police brought the situation under control and additional law enforcers were deployed to maintain law and order, he added.

Seventeen platoons of border

Horun, also the Bashgari Union Swachhasebak League president, alleged that on November 20 in 2018, police picked him up from his house in Raipura.

The police blindfolded him and tied his hands and took him to a quiet place and shot him in the leg.

Moyeen said immigration police arrested him at Dhaka airport on September 17, 2017 while he was going to the Middle East.

"I was handed over to a three-member police team from Raipura. They tied my hands and blindfolded me and took me to Raipura in a microbus.

"I was shot in my right leg. As I cried in pain, they took the blindfold. I saw the OC [Azharul] standing before me holding a gun," said Moyeen.

Deputy Inspector General Amena Begum, who was the Superintendent of Police in Narsingdi at the time, said when several thousand people attacked a police outpost and a policeman was seriously wounded, "I ordered the local OC and circle ASP to release Rup Mia, who is a heinous criminal. Police are still looking for him."

Azharul, the former OC of Raipura, denied the allegation of shooting anyone.

The current Superintendent of Police Kazi Ashraful Azim declined requests for comments on the matter.

guards were deployed in the area to maintain law and order, said a BGB statement.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, SM Sirajul Huda, superintendent of police in Panchagarh, said the deceased have been identified as Arifur Rahman, 26, and Jahid Hasan, 23.

Arifur, a resident of Masjidpara area, used to work at a local printing press, said locals.

He was returning home from a mosque after offering Juma prayers. He sustained bullet injuries in his head, said his relatives.

Arifur was rushed to Panchagarh Sadar Modern Hospital. As his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital but he died on the way, said the relatives.

It also said government censorship of the media was worsening in 47 countries while government repression of civil society organisations was worsening in 37 countries.

According to the report, the quality of elections is worsening in 30 countries.

India was placed in the 97th spot on the Liberal Democracy Index and 108th on the Electoral Democracy Index. Pakistan ranked 106th and 110th on the two indexes respectively.

2 pedestrians killed in road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two pedestrians were killed and several others injured in the capital's Rayerbagh after a speedy pickup van ran over them yesterday morning.

The dead are Akbar Hossain, 40, a CNG-run three-wheeler driver, and Hasan, 30.

Akbar died on the spot while Hasan breathed his last at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), said Mofizul Alam, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station.

Of the injured, two were policemen, he said. Police sent the bodies to DMCH morgue, seized the vehicle and detained its driver and helper, he further said.

The victims were standing under the Rayerbagh footbridge around 6:00am when the speedy pickup van hit them, said witnesses.

Rohingya crisis not forgotten

Says EU top official

UNB, Dhaka

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has assured of the EU's continuous humanitarian support to deal with the needs of Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

"This crisis is not forgotten. The EU remains one of the largest humanitarian donors, with €287m since 2017," he said after his meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam in New Delhi yesterday.

They discussed the present global crises -- climate change and vulnerabilities of the LDCs, as well as the Rohingya refugees hosted by Bangladesh.

"Great to meet Josep Borrell, high representative of foreign affairs of the EU, and talk about the bilateral relations and world affairs including the Rohingya crisis," said Shahriar.

High-yielding rice

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The BRRI dhan 105 has a GI score of 55.

Khandakar Md Iftekharuddaula, head of BRRI's Plant Breeding Division, said BRRI dhan 28 and BRRI dhan 29 are cultivated during the Boro season in about 40 percent of rice fields.

BRRI dhan 28 and BRRI dhan 29 have GI scores of 70.96 and 62.36 respectively.

The average cost of producing a kilogramme of rice is Tk 27.10; the BRRI dhan 105 will cost the same.

"It [BRRI dhan 105] has opened new prospects for farmers as low GI rice has huge demand in both international and local markets," Iftekharuddaula said.

There are three more varieties that have a low GI score namely, BR-16 with 52.4, BRRI-46 with 53.1, and BRRI-69 with 54.9.

BR-16, locally known as Balam, got approval from the National Seed Board in 1983.

Some big companies still cultivate Balam in Dinajpur's Parbatipur on a small scale as it is in demand among a certain group of people, said Iftekharuddaula, also a chief scientific officer at BRRI.

The other two varieties are also not cultivated on a large scale, he added.

The BRRI dhan 105 surpassed Balam in terms of productivity and life cycle.

The average grain yield of BRRI dhan 105 is 7.6 tonnes per hectare compared to 6 tonnes per hectare of Balam rice.

It takes around 155 to 160 days for farmers to harvest Balam rice, while for BRRI dhan 105 it takes 148 days.

This rice was first cultivated in 2006 in Cumilla on a test basis. Its yield and adaptivity were tested in 2017 and 2018 at the farmers' level.

The National Seed Board on Thursday also gave approval to BRRI dhan 106, a high-yielding rice variety suitable for non-saline tidal submergence areas.

‘I don’t want to go back to that hall’

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"I have already spoken with the proctor sir and student advisor madam for the seat allotment. I will visit the university campus on Saturday [today] regarding the administrative process for the transfer," Phulpori said.

"After getting a seat, I will return to the campus to continue my regular academic life," she claimed.

Phulpori, a first-year student of Islamic University, was tortured and humiliated at Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall on February 12 by BCL activists in the hall, found a probe committee report formed by the university.

The High Court earlier ordered the

authorities to suspend five accused students, remove the hall provost, ensure security to Phulpori, and also give her the opportunity to choose a seat at a hall.

Talking with The Daily Star, Proctor Shahadat Hossain Azad said the university authority already took necessary steps as per the High Court directives.

"Phulpori has informed me that she will come to the university on Saturday [today] to resolve the seat allotment issue. The student advisor will take necessary steps."

After the incident, Phulpori has been living with her parents in Shibpur village in Pabna.

Blinken and Lavrov

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the West is continuously saying that it is not time to negotiate yet because Ukraine must win in the battlefield before any negotiations," he said.

At the G20, the United States and its allies called on member countries to keep pressuring Russia to end the conflict, but the G20 was unable to agree on a joint statement on the war due to opposition from China and Russia, which calls its actions a "special military operation" aimed at removing what it says is a threat to its own security.

The Russian minister went on to accuse Washington of "trying to militarise" the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a partnership between the United States, Australia, India and Japan that focuses on strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

Earlier in the day, Blinken had met with his counterparts from the Quad, as the grouping is informally called,

and they issued a statement saying "the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible".

Late last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin suspended a landmark nuclear arms control treaty and threatened to resume nuclear tests.

During their brief exchange on the sidelines of the G20 meeting on Thursday, Blinken told Lavrov to end the war and urged Moscow to reverse its suspension of the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) on nuclear weapons.

The Quad statement also took a barely disguised swipe at China by denouncing actions that increase tensions in the South China Sea, and the "militarisation" of disputed territories in the area.

China has denounced the Quad as a Cold War construct and a clique "targeting other countries".

Bangladesh slips one notch

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the previous year, said the report released on Thursday.

In the Electoral Democracy Index, Bangladesh this year ranked 131st with a score of 0.28, down by 0.03 from the previous year.

"72 percent of the world's population -- 5.7 billion people -- now live in electoral or closed autocracies. That is an increase from 46 percent ten years ago. This fact is another reminder of how the wave of autocratization is unfolding across the world," the report.

It mentioned that only 13 percent population of the world lives in liberal democracies.

V-Dem Institute of Gothenburg University in Sweden has been publishing the democracy report for the last seven years.

"Türkiye is another country that went from democracy to autocracy and increased its share of global GDP from 1.3% to 2.1%. Bangladesh, Nigeria, and the Philippines are other countries that are part of this trend," the report said.

A total of 33 countries, including

Iran, China, Myanmar, and North Korea, have been placed in the "Closed Autocracies" category while 32 in the "Liberal Democracies" category and 58 in the "Electoral Democracies" category.

Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Estonia, and New Zealand are placed in the top five positions while North Korea is at the bottom.

The report said freedom of expression was deteriorating in 35 countries in 2022. Ten years ago, the figure was seven.