



DSA AMENDMENT

A promise that rings hollow

ZYMA ISLAM

Every time citizens and rights bodies demand that the Digital Security Act be repealed, the government buys time, saying reforms "are underway".

However, even after over a year since the government first spoke of making changes to the law to prevent rights abuses, the promised amendments seem to be stuck in a loop of prolonged assurances.

"Which part of the law would you not amend?" asked Irene Khan, the UN special rapporteur for freedom of expression, while speaking to The Daily Star.

"The recent use of the DSA against the Prothom Alo editor and journalist is an example of the appalling abuse of unlimited power that this law puts into the hands of the authorities. The government must withdraw the charges and abolish the law," she said, adding, "Keeping the law in the book will not solve the problem."

The government has routinely responded to these demands with a firm "no".

Even as recently as two weeks ago, both the information and law ministers reiterated in no uncertain terms that the law is here to stay.

Speaking at the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry auditorium, Law Minister Anisul Huq again tried to placate the naysayers by saying "discussions are on"



A vehicle of Dhaka North City Corporation is spurting mist on the plants and palm trees on Manik Mia Avenue to protect them from the gruelling heat. Water is also being sprayed on the road to keep the dust down. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Extreme heat elevating fire risks

Substandard wiring doesn't help things either, say experts

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Record-setting temperatures are making everything dry and more flammable, and this has been making fire incidents more frequent and lethal, experts said.

"As the temperature is rising, even a small spark is leading to major fires," said Maj (ret'd) Shakil Newaz Bhuiyan, fire and disaster expert.

Moreover, electrical wires used in the old shopping centres like Dhaka New Super Market are not suitable to power the appliances used now-a-days, said Shakil, a former director (operation and maintenance) at Fire Service and Civil Defence.

"The wires were probably good enough a decade ago. But they are not capable of withstanding the load of an air conditioner that you see everywhere," he said.

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about amending the law.

Since the DSA was passed in 2018, concerns about its abuse had been vociferously voiced by journalists, editors and rights activists, but those were routinely stonewalled in response.

Even when the protests reached a fever pitch in March 2021, after writer Mushtaq Ahmed's death while he was incarcerated under the DSA, the government's conviction about the draconian law was steadfast.

The then UN human rights commissioner Michelle Bachelet, in a statement, said, "There needs to be a complete overhaul of the DSA".

At the same time, 13 prominent ambassadors had issued a statement questioning the DSA's "compatibility with Bangladesh's obligations under international human rights laws and standards".

In response, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen had said, "You [the media] should stop giving publicity to this sort of nuisance. This should be boycotted."

Discarding all concerns about the DSA, he used the words, "Death in jail is a common phenomenon in every country, even in the USA. The strange thing is that when someone dies in jail in Bangladesh, they [foreign envoys] create hype over it and the media in the country give that publicity."

The law minister had sternly told the media that there was no question of repealing the law - but he did also add that they were "mulling changes" so that people are not arrested right away.

After more than three years of turning a deaf ear to the calls made by rights activists, there was finally a change in tune in December 2021 when the Rapid Action Battalion was sanctioned by the United States.

For the first time, Law Minister Anisul Huq had stated

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Rooppur loan to be paid in yuan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Russia have struck a preliminary agreement to make loan payments for the \$12.35 billion Rooppur nuclear power plant in yuan - a development that breaks the impasse between the two sides over the stalled repayments following Western sanctions on Russian banks.

In a meeting recently between Economic Relations Division and Russian officials, it was decided that the payments would be made in yuan in a Chinese bank account, The Daily Star has learnt from officials informed on the proceedings. They spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

At present, the government has been setting aside the amount due to Russia with the Bangladesh Bank.

Payment will begin after a final agreement between the two governments, they said, adding that about \$300 million would be paid this way.

The modalities of the payment method are yet to be thrashed out between the sides.



"The Chinese currency is an official currency for us since 2019 and we have been doing regular trade settlements with this. We settle many Japanese loans in yen. And we invest a portion of our reserves in yuan."

BB SPOKESMAN MD MEZBAUL HAQUE

Russia is insisting that Bangladesh bears the currency conversion risks and costs of converting the yuan to rouble. But Bangladesh is unwilling to agree to this condition as it will inflate the loan servicing costs.

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Searing heat to continue till Thursday

STAR REPORT

There will be no respite for the people from the sweltering heat for at least two more days as the Met office has said the heatwave will continue till Thursday.

"Currently, the temperature is two to seven degrees Celsius higher than the average temperature of April," said meteorologist Mohammad Abul Kalam Mallik.

Yesterday, the country's highest temperature, 43 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila, according to Bangladesh Meteorological Department. In Dhaka, the maximum temperature was 38.1 degrees Celsius.

The Met office said a severe heatwave is sweeping the districts of Rajshahi, Pabna, Chuadanga and Kushtia, while the other districts were experiencing mild to moderate heatwave, and it may continue.

However, the weather department predicted rain or thundershowers at one

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AL IN SYLHET CITY POLLS

Rift feared because of 'an outsider'

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

The Awami League's decision to nominate Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury, who is not even a part of any party units in Sylhet, may create a rift in the grassroots ahead of the upcoming mayoral polls.

Local party leaders and activists fear Anwaruzzaman might face a party rebel in the election due to high dissatisfaction among other nomination seekers, who are key figures in AL politics.

If there is no party rebel, a section of key ruling party leaders and their followers may even secretly extend support to the current mayor and BNP leader, Ariful Haque Chowdhury, if he contests the polls, said insiders.

"If he [Anwaruzzaman], as an outsider in the city, wins the election with the Awami League ticket, it would be the end of the grassroots politics in Sylhet," said a senior AL leader, wishing not to be named.

In 2002, the Sylhet Municipality was upgraded to Sylhet City Corporation and AL nominated Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran in all four elections till 2018. He lost the 2018 polls as many of the grassroots leaders worked against him and favoured Ariful Haque.

Kamran died of coronavirus in 2020. Several other leaders sought AL nomination in the city polls slated for June 21.

Of them, the most notable aspirants are former

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