

PM to visit India in September

She'll join G20 Summit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit New Delhi to join the G20 Summit in September, Obaidul Quader, road transport and bridges minister, said yesterday.

Besides, an Awami League delegation will also visit India in July this year to attend an invitation of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he added.

The minister made the comments while attending a programme of an India-funded project in the capital's Tejgaon.

Quader, also general secretary of the Awami League, mentioned the visits as he emphasised on further improvements of Indo-Bangla ties.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma was present at the programme.

A 17-member delegation of the AL, led by the party's Presidium Member Faruk Khan, are now visiting China to attend an invitation of China Communist Party.

BCL leader stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A leader of the Brahmanbaria district unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League was stabbed to death in the town yesterday.

Ikram Ahmed, 30, was the joint general secretary of the unit, said police.

The incident took place around 6:30pm at the Munsefpara home of one Ridwan Ansari Rimu, a former leader of BCL and Dhaka (North) BCL unit.

Rimu's cousin Raihan stabbed Ikram on the left side of his chest with a knife, said Md Shakhawat Hossain, superintendent of police in Brahmanbaria.

According to police, Ikram died of his wound on the way to Brahmanbaria General Hospital.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Officials, police and ansar members taking electronic voting machines and other election materials to polling centres from Kazi Azimuddin College in Gazipur yesterday. EVMs will be used in all polling centres in Gazipur City Corporation polls today.

Xi offers Russia 'firm support' in 'core interests'

Moscow, Beijing seal economic pacts despite Western disapproval

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping offered Beijing's support on Moscow's "core interests" at a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin yesterday.

China and Russia have in recent years ramped up economic and diplomatic cooperation, growing even closer since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine despite Beijing's insistence that it is neutral in that conflict.

Mishustin's trip this week is the highest-level visit by a Russian official to China since last year's invasion of Ukraine.

Xi told Mishustin China and Russia would continue to offer each other "firm support on issues concerning each other's core interests and strengthen collaboration in multilateral arenas", according to a readout by the official Xinhua news agency.

China and Russia should "push cooperation in various fields to a higher level", he said, and "raise the level of economic, trade and investment cooperation".

Mishustin also met with Premier Li Qiang yesterday, saying that "relations between Russia and China are at an unprecedented high level" following a grand welcoming ceremony outside Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

"They are characterised by mutual respect of each other's interests, the desire to jointly respond to challenges, which is associated with increased turbulence in the international arena and the pressure of illegitimate sanctions from the collective West," he said.

Li, in turn, hailed the "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Russia in the new era".

Ministers from the two countries signed a series of agreements



after the talks on service trade cooperation and sports, as well as on patents and Russian millet exports to China.

Mishustin is accompanied this week by top officials including Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who handles energy policy.

China last year became Russia's top energy customer as Moscow's gas exports otherwise plummeted due to a flurry of Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

And Novak told a Russia-China business forum in Shanghai on Tuesday that Russian energy supplies to China would increase by 40 percent year on year in 2023, Moscow's state media reported.

Analysts say China holds the upper hand in the relationship with Russia, and that its sway is growing as Moscow's international isolation deepens.

The leaders of both countries are "brought together more by shared grievances and insecurities than by shared goals", Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at Washington's Brookings Institution and a former White House official, told AFP.

"They both resent and feel threatened by Western leadership in the international system and believe their countries should be given greater deference on issues implicating their own interests."

In February, Beijing released a paper calling for a "political settlement" to the Ukraine conflict, but Western countries said it could enable Russia to hold much of the territory it has seized.

Meanwhile, Russia's defence minister warned yesterday that Moscow will respond to attacks on Russian soil "extremely harshly", after Russian jets and artillery fought off an armed group that crossed from Ukraine.

BNP struggling

FROM PAGE 1

said they tried for several weeks to convince the party leaders of the negative impact of their decision on the party's movement for a free and fair national election.

"Party high-ups have already announced that those who would go against its decision will be handed the highest punishment. We will wait till June 1. We believe that the party leaders will withdraw by then," he told The Daily Star.

Speaking to this correspondent wishing anonymity, a Sylhet BNP leader said the local party leaders managed to

refrain around 14 councillor hopefuls from taking part in the polls after holding several meetings with them. Among the 14 are former councillors Syed Misbah Uddin and Dinar Khan Hasu.

Syed Tawfiqul Hadi, a councillor hopeful, said, "People of my ward [ward-1] requested me to take part in the election. To respect their will, I have submitted my nomination form."

Roksana Begum Shahnaz said she was elected councillor thrice for a reserved seat for women, but she couldn't do anything for the people of her ward.

"This time around, I have decided to run for general councillor to do some good work for the people," she added.

Abdur Rakib Tuhin, councillor of ward-21, said he believed a candidate's personal image is more important than the party's image in the elections to local bodies. "I am not a leader but a supporter of the BNP. I believe my decision of taking part in the polls will not have any impact on the party."

Farhad Chowdhury Shamim, councillor of ward-6, said he would soon hold a press conference to explain his stance on taking part in the election.

Amir-Ul-Islam brings it to SC's notice

FROM PAGE 1

will look into the matter later on."

Amir-Ul-Islam, one of the framers of the constitution, read out the report that quoted Taposh as saying, "I wish I could resign and come back here [at the SCBA]. I know where to use the hammer. We had even taken down a chief justice."

Taposh then said, "The civil society members, who want to preach to us, we will bundle them in a sack and throw them into the dark water of the Buriganga."

He also said that when the Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad was formed, it included non-prominent lawyers like himself while learned, renowned, and prominent lawyer leaders were excluded.

The chief justice then interrupted Amir-Ul, saying, "Let us see. Let us run the court proceedings."

Amir-Ul then asked whether the matter would be dealt with by the court.

"Let us read it. Will we not make a decision on what should be done?" the CJ replied.

A number of pro-BNP lawyers, including former SCBA presidents Zainul Abedin and AJ Mohammad Ali, former SCBA secretary and current BNP Joint Secretary General AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, BNP Law Secretary Kayser Kamal, former SCBA secretaries Bodruddoza Badal and Ruhul Quddus Kazal were with Amir-

Ul-Islam.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin and SCBA President Md Momtaz Uddin Fakir were also present in the courtroom.

Amir-Ul later told reporters, "It is unfortunate. We are aggrieved. Not only the judiciary, the people of the whole country have been hurt by the comment [of Taposh]."

He said Mayor Taposh also slammed the civil society and senior lawyers and undermined the judiciary.

"From where did he get this right? His comments are very arrogant and tantamount to contempt of court."

Also at the May 21 event, Taposh said AY Masiuzzaman, convener of the election subcommittee for the SCBA polls last year, was a hypocrite.

"We considered Masiuzzaman a giant ... a man like an angel. Whatever he says happens. We had fair and lawful demands. Our [SCBA] secretary post candidate Abdun Nur Dulal had caught them stealing red-handed. Ballot papers disappeared. At least 3,100 votes had been cast. They said 2,600 votes had been cast, as 500 ballots disappeared. When we caught this and became firm and vocal, the cat came out of the bag. We had said the ballots cast will have to be recounted in public and then we will accept the election results..."

"They stopped vote counting and staged a drama for 41 days. Mashiuzzaman went away at the gesture

US visa curbs on those who will bar fair polls

FROM PAGE 1

Restrictions under this new policy target individuals engaging in behavior that undermines the democratic election process, regardless of affiliation."

In an immediate reaction, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam said the Bangladesh government "does not bother" about the US government's new visa policy, as the authorities are "committed" to holding a free and fair election.

"It's not a sanction. The BNP should be worried as violence before or during the election is another criterion that will trigger visa restrictions," he told UNB.

He said they will issue an official reaction today once they know the details of the new policy.

The US policy under Section 212(a) (3)(C) ("3C") of the Immigration and Nationality Act comes 18 months after Washington imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for human rights violations.

The US has been critical of the last two national elections. In 2021, it did not invite Bangladesh to the democracy summit to promote the

Biden administration's foreign policy priorities, democracy and human rights.

In recent months, Peter Haas, the American ambassador to Bangladesh, has been calling for free and fair elections. On different occasions, he said his country does not support any particular political party, and what would be the make-up of the polls time government is the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

Blinken said the US is committed to building a strong partnership with the Bangladesh government. "We welcome the prime minister's expressed commitment to holding free and fair elections."

Ali Riaz, distinguished professor of the department of politics and government at the Illinois State University, said the US move seems to have much greater implications than the targeted sanctions.

"Any individual in or outside the government, including the bureaucracy, judiciary, media, Election Commission, law enforcement can come under this policy and face punishment," he said over the phone early today.

"It is a message to everybody that they need to get their acts right."

Riaz said it is also a message that the US would not hesitate to impose sanctions against individuals or groups and it means that the US is watching the situation in Bangladesh closely.

Riaz said that in the last one year or so, eight top-level US officials visited Bangladesh and passed the same message to the government that they want free and fair elections. It could have avoided such an action from the US.

"The new policy is not applicable only for the election day. The election process has already started and the behaviours of everybody is being watched," he said.

US-Bangladesh ties are very important and over the decades the US has been extending significant support to Bangladesh. That's why the US wants Bangladesh to be on the right track. One needs to understand clearly that this policy is not against anyone but for Bangladesh and its people.

Asked if there is any geopolitics behind such an action, Riaz said, "In today's world, there is nothing beyond global politics."

outcome.

Gazipur City Corporation election is a continuation of the irregularities that started dominating Bangladesh politics in 2014, he added.

Azmat is confident that he will win because Gazipur is an AL stronghold. But Zahangir too is from AL and he has a large following among young voters.

Nearly half of the 12 lakh voters are garment factory workers. Their votes will be a deciding factor in the polls.

Returning Officer Faridul Islam yesterday said, "Senior officials of the commission and journalists will watch the voting on a big screen at the Election Commission building in Argargaon. If irregularities are seen, the Election Commission will take immediate steps."

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) Ahsan Habib Khan said, "We are keeping an eye on the election. All steps have been taken to make it free, fair and acceptable."

challenge facing Azmat.

Speaking at a press conference at his home yesterday, Zahangir said he would make complaints to government high-ups and "foreign friends" if the election turned out to be unfair.

"I will provide documents so that they [administration] do not cause any trouble," he said.

Mohammad Jalal Uddin, president of Gazipur Zila Nagorik Forum, said, "If Azmat fails this time, his career in the city corporation politics will come to an end. That's why he is so desperate. The matter is different for Zahangir. He has already lost his political identity. Now he is trying to regain it through his popularity."

Noted local government expert Tofail Ahmed has said since the irregularities in the local government elections will be patronised by law enforcers and administration officials, these elections will not give any indication of the national election's