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AL, BNP put on a show of strength

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Archrivals Awami League and BNP seek to bring as many supporters as they can at their rallies in the capital today to show their strength and popularity.

This happens at a time when delegations from the USA and the European Union are here to assess the environment in the run-up to the national election, slated for January next year.

At its event in the capital's Nayapaltan, the BNP will formally announce its one-point demand for the government – step down and give way to a non-partisan polls-time government.

BNP leaders say they are making the announcement while the delegations are here, and they want a sizable crowd to show that people support their demands.

On the other hand, the ruling AL on Monday decided to hold a massive rally near the gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

Insiders from both camps say they want a huge gathering to show their strength and popularity ahead of their meetings with the visiting European delegation on July 15.

Moreover, sources say that in order to show they act impartially, Dhaka Metropolitan Police set the same 23 conditions while giving permission for the AL and the BNP events.

Also, in a welcome change, the opposition is not seeing the usual arrests of its leaders and activists before its event.

BNP insiders say their leaders may unveil a 31-point state reform proposal at today's rally and pledge what they will do if voted to power.



Talha's mother trying to contact whoever she can over phone to get some help as her son, suffering from dengue fever, was denied admission in Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday due to an overflow of patients. Along with other hospitals in the city, Mugda has been struggling to cope with the deluge of dengue patients over the last few weeks. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Dengue deadlier for kids

Experts for quick hospitalisation of kids with symptoms

HELEMUL ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

In a grim trend over the last few days, the number of child dengue patients has shot up in hospitals across the capital.

Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, the government hospital designated for children, yesterday introduced a separate dengue cell to cope with the pressure of patients.

Abdul Hakim, public relations officer of the hospital, said that till yesterday afternoon it was treating 45 dengue patients – the highest number so far this year.

Mentioning that the hospital currently has 681 beds, he added that

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- Both AL and BNP to make their gatherings as large as possible
- BNP may unveil an outline of 31-point state reform proposal
- Police on high alert and will be as patient as possible
- DMP sets same 23-point conditions for both parties
- Jamaat is not joining one-point movement

Era of trade in rupee begins

India, Bangladesh launch landmark trade settlement mechanism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and India yesterday rolled out a landmark cross-border trade settlement mechanism involving the rupee and bypassing the US dollar.

As part of the arrangement, Indian exports and imports, which amount to about \$16 billion, can be invoiced, paid for and settled in the rupee.

The State Bank of India's Bangladesh operations, Sonali Bank and Eastern Bank have opened special rupee accounts with two Indian banks: SBI's international services branch in Mumbai and ICICI Bank.

Bangladeshi exporters will receive their proceeds in rupee in those accounts and that balance would be used to pay for the imports from India. In short, import bills equivalent to the export proceeds can be settled under the mechanism. The exchange rate used would be market-determined.

The move comes as part of India's push to make the rupee a global currency and a part of the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Rights, an international reserve asset created by the Washington-based lender to

supplement the official reserves of its member countries.

The value of the SDR is based on a basket of five currencies: dollar, euro, renminbi, yen and pound sterling.

As part of the efforts, the Reserve Bank of India has put in place a mechanism to settle international trade in rupees. The RBI has allowed banks from 18 countries to settle payments in the rupee, including Sri Lanka, Israel, Russia, Germany, Singapore and the UK. The Bangladesh Bank has now joined the fray.

"Today's event marks the beginning of a new chapter in our economic and commercial partnership," said Pranay Verma, the Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh, at the launch ceremony.

Successful use of the settlement mechanism will ease pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves and reduce transaction costs with the neighbouring country, said Bangladesh Bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder.

The loss that takes place for trading in dollars thanks to multiple conversions would be minimised, facilitating greater trade competitiveness.

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TOP BUSINESS LEADERS WELCOME
TRADE IN RUPEE WITH INDIA – B1

EU delegation enquires about EC preparations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Exploratory Mission of the European Union yesterday enquired about the Election Commission's preparations for the next general polls.

The mission sat down with the EC at its Agargaon office in the capital.

At another meeting with Attorney General AM Amin Uddin at his Supreme Court office, it wanted to learn about Bangladesh's electoral laws.

An EU technical team will sit with a technical team of the EC any day between July 18 and 22 to hold further talks, especially on legal issues.

The EU mission, which arrived in Dhaka on Saturday, held meetings with foreign diplomats and senior officials of the ministries of foreign affairs and Chattogram Hill Tracts affairs, police and Human Rights Commission on Sunday and Monday.

Yesterday, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal responded to the EU delegation's queries.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting at the EC, EU mission head Riccardo Chelleri said they are in Bangladesh to assess pre-election conditions and prepare an analysis for EU High Representative Josep Borrell who will decide whether or not to deploy an election observation mission for the next parliamentary polls.

Mentioning that they came to Bangladesh at the invitation of the government, Chelleri thanked the authorities for the very warm welcome extended to them.

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'Why is my daughter not getting bail?'

Khadijatul Kubra's mother asks

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Since Khadijatul Kubra's arrest 10 months ago, a question has been haunting her mother: what has her daughter done to be denied bail?

"Many people arrested for committing severe crimes are granted bail within a few months. But my innocent daughter could not get it in the last 10 months and I don't know why," a distressed Fatema Khatun told this correspondent on the premises of a Dhaka court yesterday.

Khadija, a student of Jagannath University, was produced before the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka yesterday for a hearing on the charge framing in two Digital Security Act cases filed against her for hosting a webinar.

After the hearing on the defence's petition, Judge AM Julfiker Hayet of the tribunal set November 30 for the next hearing.

Khadija has so far been denied bail as many as six times, her family members said.

Fatema said that every time a hearing comes along, she has high hopes for her daughter to get bail. "But that never seems to happen."

She added, "My husband and I have become sick just thinking about what our daughter might be going through in jail. I haven't been able to sleep since her arrest. Only Allah knows when she will be relieved from her sufferings."

Fatema and her elder daughter, Monira, came to the court premises around 9:00am yesterday to attend the hearing. After Khadija was brought to the tribunal around 10:15am, her mother entered the courtroom but could not bear to face the entire hearing. She opted to sit and wait outside, where she was seen sobbing.

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Not knowing what her daughter's fate might come to, a worried Fatema Khatun, mother of Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra, waits silently outside the Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka during a hearing on two DSA cases under which Khadija was arrested last year. Inset, Khadija being taken back to jail after the hearing. She has been languishing in jail for over 10 months for hosting a talk show where a former army officer was said to have made contentious remarks. PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Call for free, fair polls not interference

US state dept says about Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US State Department wonders why anyone would object to Washington's calls for free and fair elections in Bangladesh.

"I don't know why anyone would object to us calling for free and fair elections. I will note that the prime minister of Bangladesh has repeatedly stated her own commitment to free and fair elections. It's a desire that we share as a friend and partner of Bangladesh for over 50 years," said the US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller at a briefing in Washington DC on Monday.

He made the comment in response to a question on recent criticism from China, Russia and Iran that the statements and letters from the US and European Union politicians were interfering in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

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