

## POST-COUP MYANMAR Junta cuts six yrs of Suu Kyi's 33-yr jail term

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar reduced ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's 33-year prison sentence by six years in a partial pardon yesterday, as the junta struggles to quell bloody resistance to its rule.

The country has been ravaged by violence in the two years since Suu Kyi was deposed in a coup and hit with 19 criminal cases ranging from corruption to breaching Covid-19 rules.

There have been concerns for the 78-year-old Nobel laureate's health and the junta moved her from prison to a government building last week.

"Six years imprisonment will be reduced," junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told reporters after it was announced she had been pardoned in five cases.

Suu Kyi still faces 14 cases despite the pardon. Rights groups have condemned the legal battle against her as a sham designed to remove a popular democratic leader from the public eye.

Former Myanmar president Win Myint, who was also removed in the 2021 coup, was granted a four-year reduction in relation to two cases, the junta spokesman said.

Yesterday's announcement was part of an amnesty of more than 7,000 prisoners to mark Buddhist Lent, including 125 foreigners who are to be released and pardoned.

An unspecified number of prisoners facing the death penalty also had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, the announcement said.

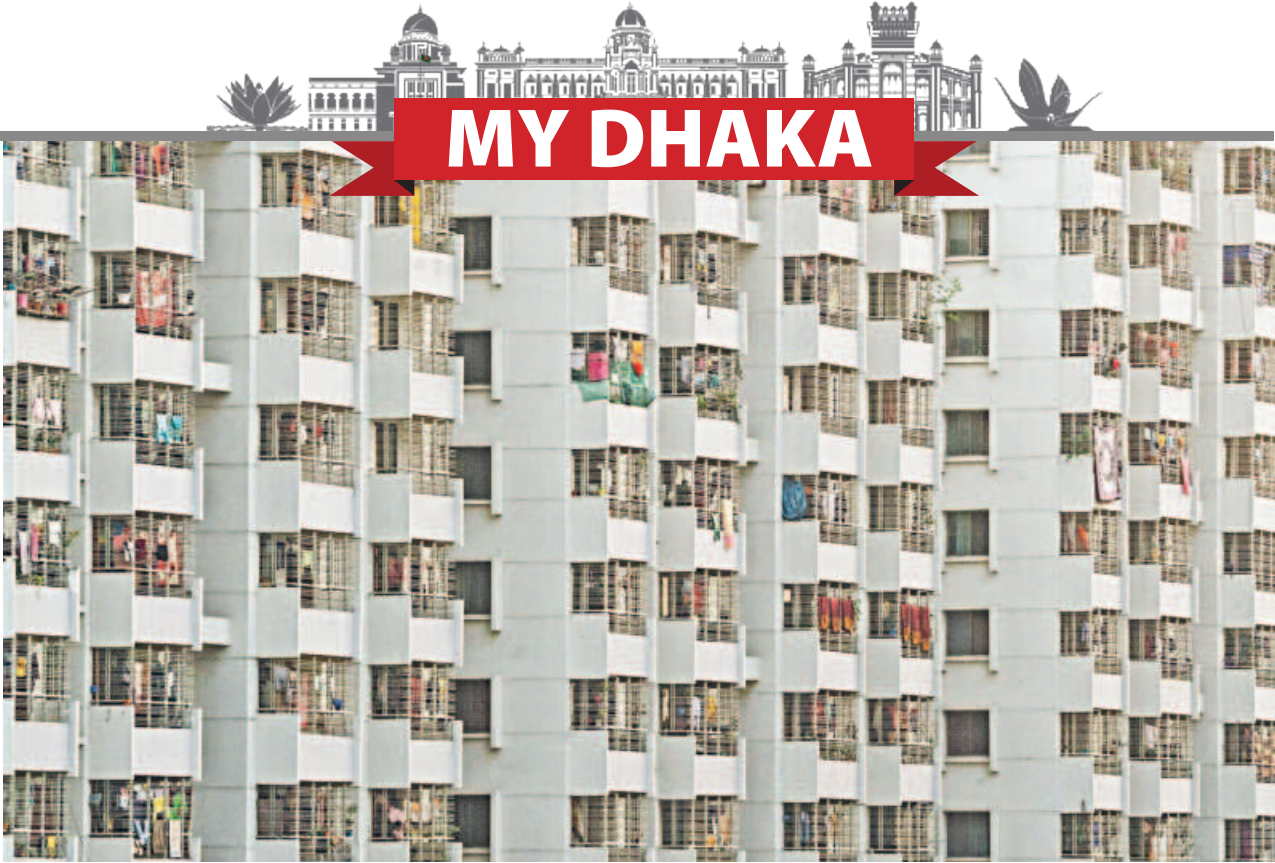
David Mathieson, an independent analyst on Myanmar, said the partial pardon was a "cynical ploy to tell the world that there might be some kind of political resolution coming. When we know that there is not".

"I think they are just playing cruel games with a political prisoner," Mathieson told AFP. "All the charges against her are absurd and shaving six years off 33 isn't mercy."

Human Rights Watch's Asia division deputy director Phil Robertson said the junta aimed "to create the impression of moderation and dialogue when in fact there really is none on offer".



There are many reasons for such apathy. The biggest reason is probably the fact that Dhaka is so busy that people just cannot afford the time to socialise with each other. While this is true and an accepted practice in most big cities, it is not a pleasant thought from a sociological perspective. There are countless instances where people have lived in apartments side by side for years and they did not even know each other's name.



## Know your neighbour?

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Dhaka is full of opportunities and possibilities but they come at a price. In a city as busy as this one, sacrificing social bonds has become the norm. While in villages or even smaller cities, people form strong or at least decent bonds with their neighbours, it is not so frequent in this metropolis.

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Shahed Rahman is in his forties and works at a private institution. He owns a flat in Mirpur and has been living there for a few years now. He does not interact much with his neighbours.

"I know it sounds bad but it's not that simple. Even if I want to interact with my neighbour, maybe he doesn't

feel the same way. If my neighbourly interest is not shared then it becomes difficult to maintain that relationship," said Rahman.

"If you try to approach someone to speak, they often do not take it as an innocent neighbourly approach. They begin to wonder about your motives for being friendly," said Mushfiq Fuad Mitul, a new father who lives in Khilgaon with his small family.

Most of Dhaka practices this individualistic approach when it comes to neighbours and holds the belief that it is better to keep yourself to yourself. But the keyword is "most". There are parts of Dhaka where neighbours interact regularly with each other. Old Dhaka is a prime example of this.

Sagar Kar, a young businessman who presently lives in Tongi, has lived in Uttara and Old Dhaka over the years. With the entirety of his childhood spent in old Dhaka, Sagar holds the experience of living there for more than 20 years.

"First there is the fact that the entire area of Old Dhaka itself is a cultural hub that has its own traditions, norms, and festivals. This alone makes Old

Dhaka different from the rest of the city and this is a big factor in how neighbours interact with each other," said Sagar citing the examples of Eid, Puja, and Shakrain and how everyone in Old Dhaka participates in those celebrations spontaneously.

"Another factor is how the buildings are designed. The city has many individual flats that are designed to keep everyone separate, you can live in one of these flats and not have to interact with anyone else and it will not matter. But the buildings in Old Dhaka are not designed that way. So, you run into each other and for one reason or another, have to interact with each other. This builds a bond. Besides, Old Dhaka still has that classic norms where people don't have that individualistic ego. While the rest of the city might not take your friendliness quite as easily, Old Dhaka does not mind," added Sagar.

Being too friendly to a neighbour can indeed make things complicated but reaching out and introducing yourself to your neighbour is not the worst idea. That way, at least you can feel less awkward in the elevators.

## US to send pre-polls observers in October

FROM PAGE 1

Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal at the Election Commission office yesterday.

"The United States's only interest in the election is that it would be free, fair and peaceful. And that the people of Bangladesh have the ability to choose who governs them," Peter Haas told reporters after the meeting.

"I informed him [the CEC] that the US will send a pre-election monitoring team in early October."

It will include experts from the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and people with vast experience in election monitoring and preparations.

Haas, however, said he could not yet provide the detailed schedule of the team's visit.

The US ambassador said he and the CEC discussed a number of issues, including the recent changes to the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the approval process for new political parties, election assessment and monitoring teams.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, CEC Kazi Habibul Awal said the US ambassador heard about the EC's power being curtailed as a result of the recent amendments to the RPO.

"We explained to him how the EC's power was rather enhanced [through the amendment]."

He added Haas also learned that the commission has taken steps to

provide registration opportunities to parties that are less active in politics.

"We told him we are strictly following the criteria of registering a political party. Two such parties have fulfilled the criteria and are getting registered.

Habibul also told Haas that the role of the media and observers is important for transparency in elections.

"He [Peter Haas] wanted to know whether the journalists on motorcycles would be allowed to do their jobs on election day. We told him we were considering it," the CEC said.

The US shared its decision to send the pre-polls monitoring team nine days after the EU's Election Exploratory Mission wrapped up its July 9-23 visit to Bangladesh.

The mission, led by Riccardo Chelleri, will prepare a report on the outcome of the visit, based on which the EU will determine whether it would send an election observing team during the parliamentary polls, slated for late December or early January.

VIENNA CONVENTION

Meanwhile, Peter Haas yesterday told reporters, "In the US, when other countries raise issues with us about our domestic political affairs, we listen to them and see what we can learn from them. We don't feel it a violation of the Vienna Convention."

Haas said this when asked about State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam's comment saying

the joint statement by 13 foreign missions, condemning the attack on Dhaka-17 by-polls' candidate Hero Alam, was a violation of the Vienna Convention.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 is an international treaty that defines a framework for diplomatic relations between independent countries.

On July 26, Alam termed the joint statement condemning the attack a "violation of diplomatic norms" and urged the missions to refrain from "non-diplomatic behaviour" in the future.

He said the convention's article 41(1) states that without prejudice to their privileges and immunities, it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that State.

While, he added, article 41(2) says all official business with the receiving State entrusted to the mission by the sending State shall be conducted with or through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the receiving State or such other ministry as may be agreed.

The 13 missions – the US, UK, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the EU – in the statement called upon the government to conduct a full investigation into the attack and take legal steps against the perpetrators.

## UN special rapporteur

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Meanwhile, Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for UN secretary general, told a press briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York yesterday that the UN encourages peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections in Bangladesh.

He made the comment in response to a query from a journalist on UN's position regarding Bangladesh's promise to hold fair elections.

The journalist also asked the spokesman's comment on Bangladesh's present government's unique example of humanity through sheltering more than a million displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar but criticism from the rights groups and some US Congress members.

Fourteen US Congress members recently wrote to Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, demanding the expulsion

of Bangladesh from the UN Human Rights Commission and the parliamentary elections be held under the supervision of the UN.

Farhan said it was not for him to comment on membership in the Human Rights Council, which is a decision taken by member states.

He, however, appreciated the generosity shown by Bangladesh towards the Rohingya refugees and hoped that it continues.

## Sit together to end crisis

FROM PAGE 1

Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "People who should not be at the Election Commission have gained the positions. It is the outcome of a political crisis.

"We are talking about dialogue. But what will be the basis of the dialogue? It has become clear to locals and foreigners that a free, fair election is not possible under the current government."

The BNP standing committee member added that an impartial government is needed for a proper election. "And for that, a dialogue can be held."

Contacted over phone, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said that there was no political crisis in the country.

"The BNP is conspiring against the government to spoil the election. They do not want to take part in the election because they don't have a chance to assume power with the people's vote because of their misdeeds."

BNP's demands are unconstitutional, undemocratic and illogical, he said, "The decision of dialogue can be made based on the situation. The door is open for dialogue for any party that speaks in line with the constitutions."

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik

(Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar told The Daily Star that there was no alternative to dialogue. "It is not possible to resolve the crisis through force..." he said.

Violence can turn Bangladesh into a conflict zone, and it can invite the UN peacekeeping forces to the country during the elections, he said.

"The government should take the initiative to hold dialogues."

Last week, 14 US congressmen in a letter to the US ambassador to the UN, urged the UN to make arrangements for the presence of peacekeeping forces in Bangladesh during elections "to prevent intimidation, harassment or assault of voters".

At yesterday's meeting between the ambassador and the CEC, the former said the US will send a pre-election monitoring team in early October to assess the pre-polls situation.

In May, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the US would impose visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members "if they are responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh."

An European election exploratory mission visited Bangladesh from July 9-23 to determine whether the EU would send a team to observe the country's next parliamentary polls.

obstructions from the then caretaker government.

"How come they can make such big remarks under the supervision of a convicted fugitive?" she said.

Hasina said her government believes in democracy and is showing tolerance.

Referring to the arson violence carried out in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and the repression unleashed by BNP on AL leaders and activists, she said, "If we took one percent revenge [of these misdeeds], now your whereabouts can't be found. We don't believe in revenge."

At the beginning, one-minute

## Man sent to jail in DSA case for making FB post against PM

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A Rangpur court sent a man to jail yesterday after an Awami League leader filed a case against him under the Digital Security Act for making remarks against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Facebook.

Police arrested Habib Bin Mizan, 28, of Gandhabpur village in Pirganj upazila, on Monday afternoon.

According to police, Mizan made a Facebook post against Hasina over power crisis on Monday afternoon.

A police team then arrested him at his home. Rabiul Islam, chairman of Kabilpur Union Parishad and also vice-president of Pirganj upazila AL, lodged the case under the DSA act at night.

He told local journalists that Mizan made the remarks to deteriorate law and order in the upazila ahead of PM's visit to Rangpur.

## Jamaat seeks DMP permission for rally on Friday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Denied permission from the DMP to hold a rally in Dhaka yesterday, Jamaat-e-Islami announced that it will hold the event on Friday.

Nurul Islam Bulbul, ameer of Jamaat's Dhaka city (south) unit, told a press conference in the capital yesterday.

The party did not disclose the rally venue to "avoid police harassment", a central leader told The Daily Star.

On July 24, Jamaat announced that it would hold a rally yesterday at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram to press home its three-point demand, including holding the next national election under a caretaker government.

But Dhaka Metropolitan Police on Monday night said Jamaat would not be given permission for the rally as they have intelligence report that subversive activities might be carried out centring the rally.

Jamaat yesterday sought permission from the DMP for the Friday's rally.

## Two university students drown in Gopalganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, FARIDPUR

Two female students of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University in Gopalganj drowned in the university lake yesterday.

Tasfia Jahan Ritu, 20, and Tania Hiya, 20, were second-year students of environment and disaster management department.

Md Kamruzzaman, the university proctor, said, "It was raining heavily around 12:30pm. Ritu and Tania were getting drenched at the edge of the lake. At one stage, Tania slipped into the lake. Ritu went in to save her. But both drowned."

Some students found them and took them to Gopalganj 250-bed General Hospital where on-duty doctors declared them dead, the proctor added.

## Two-day holiday in Iran over severe heat

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday declared a two-day holiday for government workers and banks nationwide as searing temperatures sweep across the country, state media reported.

The decision came after the meteorological office forecast temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in many cities, and nearly 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in the southwest.

"The cabinet agreed to the health ministry proposal to declare Wednesday and Thursday public holidays all over the country to protect public health," the official IRNA news agency quoted government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi as saying.

It said the decision was taken because of "unprecedented heat" sweeping the country.

The ministry has also warned of the risks of heatstroke from over-exposure to the sun, and urged people to stay indoors between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm.

Health ministry spokesman Pedram Pakain described the number of heat-related illnesses in recent days as "alarming".

silence was observed to pay tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his family members and others who were martyred on August 15, 1975.

Bangladesh Awami League's presidium members Engr Mosharraf Hossain, Begum Matia Chowdhury and Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, its joint general secretaries Mahbubul Alam Hanif and AFM Bahauddin Nasim also spoke at the discussion.

Krishak League president Samir Chanda presided over the event moderated by its general secretary Umme Kulsum Smriti.