

POST-COUP MYANMAR Junta, Russia agree on polls ‘cooperation’

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta and Russia have signed a memorandum on “cooperation in election activities”, state media reported yesterday, as both governments plan for polls that critics say will be neither free nor fair.

Moscow is a close ally of the junta, providing arms and diplomatic support as Myanmar's military struggles to crush armed opposition to its February 2021 coup.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing met President Vladimir Putin last year during one of several trips to Russia since seizing power. The Myanmar military has described Moscow's invasion of Ukraine as “justified”.

Officials from the junta-stacked election commission signed a “memorandum of understanding for cooperation in election activities” with their Russian counterparts during a recent visit to Russia, the Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

The delegation “also explored Russia's election methods, conditions for conducting elections, campaign procedures”, the newspaper said.

The head of Russia's election commission had also invited Myanmar to observe presidential elections scheduled for next year. That vote is expected to prolong Putin's rule until at least 2030, with many of his critics in jail or in exile.

Myanmar's military has justified its putsch with unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud in 2020 elections won resoundingly by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

The junta will likely hold fresh polls in 2025, a senior official from a military-backed party told AFP earlier this month.

The United States has said any elections under the junta would be a “sham” and analysts say they would be targeted by the military's opponents.

Russia has said it backs the generals' plan for polls.

Suu Kyi's NLD – which has trounced military-backed parties in every election it has fought – was dissolved earlier this year for failing to re-register under tough new military-drafted electoral rules.

The coup ended a 10-year democratic experiment and plunged the country into turmoil.

Fighting between the military and its opponents has displaced almost two million people, according to the United Nations.



PHOTO: SILVIA MAHJABIN

JUSTICE SHAHABUDDIN AHMED PARK A refreshing urban retreat

AYMAN ANIKA

Life, in all its shades and colours, can often become too overwhelming for me, and this is why I let myself escape into a green space. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park, a serene oasis at Gulshan 2, holds a special place in my heart — and here, my scattered thoughts find peace. This park is, indeed, a haven of tranquillity and natural beauty in the bustling Dhaka city.

As Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park is not very far from my home, I have had the privilege of spending countless hours amid the verdant beauty that cocoons me. This well-maintained park offers the city residents a refreshing urban retreat like no other.

Raisa Hakim, a single mother and software engineer, often comes here with her daughter to jog and unwind. She shares, “The environment and security of this park is impressive. I feel at ease coming here. I let my daughter play and take a walk at the same time, and thankfully, I don't have to worry about her safety.”

This place was renovated recently, and the introduction of modern amenities, including a well-equipped basketball court, clean restrooms, and seating areas, has made it even more

appealing to families and children alike.

You would see both teenagers and adults actively playing on the basketball court; kids playing on the playgrounds while parents overlooking them or chatting with other parents.

The park has been carefully crafted to harmonise with the natural surroundings, ensuring it seamlessly integrates with the urban environment while preserving its ecological balance. The layout of the wooden walkway above the lake and water features reflects thoughtful planning aimed at enhancing the visitor experience.

As soon as you step into the park, you are greeted by clean surroundings and North End Coffee Roasters — offering you a delightful coffee experience that blends the soothing ambience of the park with the aromatic allure of freshly brewed coffee.

Nevertheless, what truly captivates me is the bookstore, Bookworm Bangladesh, which adds warmth and cosiness to the park's natural charm!

Shams Islam, a retired army official and a regular jogger, routinely visits the bookstore. While scrolling through the bookshelves, he answered, “Back in the day, I was an avid reader. However, due to work and family obligations, I

lost the habit of reading. But this place has revived my habit again.”

Dhaka is a city that rarely allows you to slow down and take a breather. How many parks in the capital would you find such a bookstore that lets you enjoy a quiet time of reading? None perhaps!

Surely, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park has set an example of how a public park should look like.

The pathways are lined with lights that cast a warm glow in the evenings, making it an idyllic place for an evening stroll or jog. For the health-conscious, the park offers well-maintained jogging tracks and outdoor fitness equipment.

The park's amphitheatre will be a place of enjoyment for people with a penchant for culture and the arts. Various events are arranged here — from yoga classes to musical performances — it's a space where creativity flourishes.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park is more than just a green space in the city — it's an ideal place to introspect, a sanctuary for the senses and a place to rediscover your connection with the natural world.

So, the next time you yearn for a break from the daily grind, head to this oasis in the heart of the city!



S Alam seeks injunction on all media

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Alam and Farzana allege in their petition that The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and New Age, and Barrister Suman have violated the status quo by “passing negative remarks and making defamatory statements against the applicants”.

They further claim that this is all being done with the intention to harass them.

“Since last year, The Daily Star has been intentionally targeting the petitioner and his business concerns, S Alam Group, by publishing frivolous news and spreading propagandas,” the petition alleges.

“The said newspapers have also been threatening the applicants to publish further news regarding the same subject matter.”

“From an insider source it has been found out that The Daily Star has been gathering information to further report on the S Alam Group ahead of the national elections,” it claims.

“Several newspaper reporters have started working in different branches of Dhaka and Chattogram to report on the S Alam Group as well as Islami Bank Ltd. In parallel, another report is being prepared on the close relatives of the Chairman for the sole purpose of harassing the petitioner and his close associates and relatives.”

“Since the national election is coming, the said reports are likely to be prepared and published with the ulterior motive to attack the government and other organisations which have been developing the economy of the country under the ruling government,” the petition claims.

While on the one hand The Daily Star gives the impression that it supports democracy, but “it seeks by underhand methods by attacking business houses which are known to support the government, thereby attacking a particular political party.”

“This is the worst form of abuse that any journalist or any mainstream media house can perpetrate on democracy and the electoral processes in Bangladesh,” it adds.

“Such an action may kindly be

prevented by this Honourable Court,” the couple pleads.

The petition describes Alam as an exceptional businessman, and speaks of his contributions to the economy and continuous support for the nation.

The petition speaks about how the report published by The Daily Star titled “S Alam's Aladdin's Lamp” on August 4 was “baseless, frivolous, false, inaccurate and unsupported”.

The aforementioned investigation by The Daily Star found S Alam has built a business empire in Singapore worth at least about \$1 billion, although there is no record of him taking any permission from Bangladesh Bank to invest or transfer any funds abroad.

The Bangladesh central bank has so far allowed 17 companies to invest outside the country, and this Chattogram-based business giant is not among them, according to Bangladesh Bank documents cited in the report.

Yet in Singapore, Alam bought at least two hotels, two homes, one retail space, and other properties over the last one decade, all the while seeking to remove his name from the paper trails, documents obtained from Singaporean regulatory authorities show.

To set up his business in Singapore, he and his wife used Cypriot citizenship, according to The Daily Star findings. That investigation also tracked down his businesses in Cyprus and the British Virgin Islands.

In their Tuesday's petition for a gag order, Alam and his wife said they have foreign nationality or are incorporated in foreign countries and the relevant Bangladeshi laws do not have extra-territorial effect and do not permit investigation. “Otherwise, it would become possible to investigate and report on foreign assets of all expatriate Bangladeshi citizens or persons of Bangladeshi origin.”

The petition also delves into comments by Barrister Suman in a TV interview regarding the Appellate Division's status quo order, stalling the ACC investigation.

“Suman has inferred that the order

of status quo has been obtained because of the presence of bigshot lawyers. He also inferred that because of the order passed by this court his heart has been bleeding [...] He further inferred that journalists have not been publishing enough news about the corruption of the applicants,” reads the petition.

“Most illegally Suman has stated that this type of order encouraged general people to do money laundering,” it adds.

The petition asks the court to take actions to have all videos of Suman concerning the topic removed.

6 Bangladeshis

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identified. They are Shaheen and Sujana of Rajbari, and Mamun and Shihab of Narayanganj.

Identities of the two other deceased remained unknown, it said.

Currently, an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 Bangladeshis, including the undocumented ones, are believed to be residing in Libya, Rasel said.

The mission in the Facebook post said it was communicating round the clock with international agencies and local authorities involved in rescue operations to learn about the latest situation of Bangladeshis living there.

According to international media, nearly 10,000 people were missing in Libya after the severe storm slammed into its eastern coast this week. The death toll stands at 6,000 and is expected to rise as operations continue to recover bodies.

Storm Daniel formed over Greece on September 4. It caused strong winds, heavy rains, flooding and deaths there and in Turkey and Bulgaria before crossing the Mediterranean.

The storm made landfall in Libya a few days later, causing flooding on Sunday in cities along its eastern coast, including Benghazi, Bayda and Derna.

Derna was the hardest hit after two dams burst upstream, releasing an estimated 30 million cubic metres (39 million cubic yards) of water that tore through the city of about 100,000 inhabitants, according to Al Jazeera.

Islamic banks face liquidity challenges

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At the end of 2021, the LCR was 188.5 percent, it said.

Conventional banks had adequate liquidity profiles, with an industry average LCR of 154 percent.

“However, liquidity is improving, underpinned by central bank support in the form of the Islamic Bank Liquidity Facility and Mudarabah Liquidity Support, and still notable public demand for Islamic deposit products.”

Islamic banks held 25.3 percent of all domestic industry deposits at the end of June, down from 28.2 at end-H22.

Bangladesh had the eighth-largest Islamic banking market globally at the end of 2022, with total assets of Tk 497,070 crore (\$45.3 billion), ahead of Indonesia, Bahrain, Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan and Oman, based on data from the Islamic Financial Services Board.

The market share, based on industry loans, is rising and reached 29.1 percent at the end of June, in contrast to 28.5 percent a year earlier.

Bangladesh has the third-largest Muslim population globally, with sizable segments being shariah-sensitive.

Islamic branches and windows of conventional banks are expanding, with an 8.2 percent share of Islamic banking deposits as of June, in contrast to 7.1 percent a year earlier.

The remaining 91.8 percent is held by full-fledged Islamic banks.

The Islamic finance industry in Bangladesh continues to face key structural impediments.

These include a lack of sukuk and other Shariah-compliant investment options, gaps in human capital development, a lack of unified Shariah rulings, and an Islamic finance regulatory framework that requires an update.

Resolve political crisis

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votes were cast “the night before the election day”, he said.

“We are in fear about the coming election.... Will all political parties be able to take part? Will voters be able to cast their vote freely?”

“We have created a situation that allows many foreign countries to make comments about the polls in Bangladesh. Different states are looking at us. If we fail, we will pay for it.”

Former ambassador Humayun Kabir said people expect an inclusive and competitive election that is free from influence of money and muscles.

Local government expert Tofail Ahmed said the ruling party had already started electioneering while police and administration officials sought votes in violation of the service rules.

Former secretary Abu Alam Shahid Khan said, “The Election Commission will have to shoulder the liability if the election is not participatory.”

But the reality is, the EC cannot hold a “good election unless the government wants it”.

Prothom Alo Joint Editor Sohrab Hassan said a major challenge facing the EC is getting the parties to take part. “The commission should urge the government to create a situation conducive for participation of all parties.”

Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta said, “People have lost faith in the Election Commission over the years.... Minority communities are the worst victims of election-time violence. It is important to gain confidence within one's own country first.”

Journalists Kazi Abdul Hannan and Mahbub Kamal observed that free and fair elections cannot be held under a partisan government.

But Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin said if the EC worked with confidence and integrity, a fair election was possible even under a partisan government.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal said, “Different kinds of crises are present.... I have been saying it repeatedly. If politicians do not create a conducive environment for us, it will be difficult for us to hold elections.”

11 CASES AGAINST KHALEDA Hearing on charge-framing October 12

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday set October 12 for hearing on framing charges against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in 11 cases, including one for sedition.

Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court adjourned the hearing and set the new date, said Additional Public Prosecutor Tapash Kumar Pal.

The adjournment order came following petitions submitted by the defence citing different reasons.

Khaleda, now out of jail following an executive order from the government, was admitted to Evercare Hospital in the capital a few days ago. She is now undergoing treatment there for various ailments.

Among the 11 cases, 10 were filed in the first three months of 2015 over arson attacks, while the other one was lodged with a Dhaka court on charges of making seditious comments on freedom fighters and martyrs of the Liberation War.

JUBO LEAGUE LEADER MURDER SC wants explanation on prompt release of accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday wanted to know how an accused in the Cumilla Jubo League leader Jamal murder case got released from jail the same day the High Court had granted him bail.

The chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, directed the chief judicial magistrate of Cumilla to explain how his court executed the bail bond of accused Sohel Shikder so expeditiously and allowed him to be freed from jail.

The chamber judge cancelled the HC order that granted bail to Sohel on September 3 and directed him to surrender before the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court by September 21.

Justice Enayetur also ordered the SC registrar general to form a committee to probe how the HC bail order reached the Cumilla court so fast and how the court conducted the bail bond of Sohel.

The SC registrar general has been asked to submit the probe report to the SC by November 11.

The SC chamber judge passed the order following a petition filed by the state, challenging the HC bail order for Sohel.

Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi appeared for the state.

3 workers die as sand pile collapses on them

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Three labourers were killed as a sand pile collapsed on them at Jaukura Ghat of Rajbari Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

The victims were Rahim Sheikh, 52, Maruf Sheikh, 19, and Md Rimon.

Daud Sheikh, manager of sand trader Hannan Sheikh, said when the three were loading sand onto a truck around 10:45pm, suddenly the sand pile collapsed on them.

He added that they were rescued and taken to Rajbari Sadar Hospital, where doctors declared them dead.

Hannan stocks sand at Jaukura Ghat for sale. Md Iftekharuzzaman, additional superintendent of police (Sadar circle) of Rajbari, said they were investigating whether there was any negligence on the part of the sand trader.