

## VIOLENCE-FREE POLLS

### It’s not possible without support from all: Momen

UNB, New York

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the government cannot guarantee a violence-free election without sincere cooperation from all stakeholders.

He made this remark at a press briefing, replying to a question about an election-related discussion between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on Thursday.

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“It is clear that we want to make the next election free and fair. They [the US] said to make it peaceful as well. Then we said that we couldn’t guarantee it.”

Foreign Minister  
AK Abdul Momen

guarantee it,” said Momen, adding that the arrangement of a peaceful election does not depend on the government alone.

“There is such an environment in our country where sincere cooperation from all political parties and people, irrespective of their views, is required to make sure that the election be free from violence,” he said.

The US can assist Bangladesh so that people from all parties and views cooperate to make the election peaceful, he added.

“In our country, the election will be held in line with our country’s constitution. We believe in people. We don’t think anyone can come to power without the mandate of the people. If anyone comes to power through vote-rigging, the government will not last long,” said Momen.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a meeting with Uzra Zeya, US under-secretary for civilian security, democracy, and human rights, at the UN headquarters in New York yesterday. PHOTO: PID

## DHAKA CITY CORPORATIONS

### Measures not enough to check waterlogging

DIPAN NANDY

Dhaka continues to grapple with waterlogging during the monsoon as different measures taken by the two city corporations have failed to make any substantive contribution to improve the city’s drainage system.

To check waterlogging, Dhaka South City Corporation has taken up a project to recover, clean, and re-excavate four canals – one each in Kalunagar, Zirani, Manda, and Shyampur. Nearly a year after the 898 crore-project was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council, no visible progress has been made in reclaiming any of the canals.

Talking to this correspondent, DSCC spokesperson Abu Nasher said, “The project has been approved by Ecneec, and we have already started the recruitment process for consultants. Work will begin shortly after that.”

The two city corporations officially took

over the responsibility of the city’s canals and drainage management from Dhaka WASA on December 31, 2020. The aim of the change in custodian was to reduce waterlogging.

Dhaka North City Corporation has submitted a similar proposal to re-excavate canals with the aim of addressing waterlogging issues. The DNCC project, which awaits approval at Ecneec, has proposed to reclaim the Baunia canal, the Kurmitola canal, and the Mirpur Sangbadik Colony canal.

As far as managing the canals and the drainage system is concerned, the city corporations’ most visible initiative is the routine work of removing garbage from the canals and drains, which experts believe fall short of preventing the drainage system from being clogged.

Before being the custodian of canals and drains, the various projects the two city corporations carried out from 2016 to 2020 included de-cluttering of canals,

canal-drains, and box culverts, and removal of accumulated waste, said several engineers at the DSCC and DNCC, on condition of anonymity. The corporations spent around Tk 1,300 crore on those projects, they added.

But those measures did not yield any desired result as after a few days of cleaning, things went back to square one as the canals got clogged with waste again, they also said.

Waterlogging remains to be a perennial problem in the city as a result. On Thursday night, commuters experienced a night of horror as major parts of the capital went under water after 113 millimetres of torrential rain, disrupting people’s movement and triggering massive traffic chaos.

This monsoon, the city dwellers had similar experiences on at least two other occasions – on July 1 and August 9 – when vehicles were stuck on inundated streets for hours.

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## Fair polls not possible unless this govt quits

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“The Awami League government does not allow anyone to cast their votes and seizes everything by force. Now, we have taken to the streets and are holding road marches. We are on the streets with the people. Our message is very clear: There will be no polls under Sheikh Hasina,” he told the rally organised by Dhaka (north) city unit of the BNP.

The government will be defeated through the movement, said the BNP leader, adding, “Our mothers and sisters have awakened, and they don’t want to see this government in power again.”

Fakhrul said the government wants to hold the election just like it did in previous polls. “There is no controversy over the elections held under a caretaker government. However, the Awami League cancelled the caretaker system to stay in power, ignoring the people’s opinions.”

Mentioning the condition of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia’s critical health, Fakhrul demanded the government send her abroad immediately for advanced treatment.

“Today, when she is in a life-and-death situation, she has been detained ... She is being pushed to death,” he said.

Referring to instances of governments sending prisoners abroad, Fakhrul said, “ASM Abdur Rab was sent abroad ... Ziaur Rahman sent him to Germany for treatment. Sheikh Hasina was also sent to America for treatment during the caretaker government. We haven’t forgotten that.”

Meanwhile, BNP chief Khaleda, who is undergoing treatment at Evercare Hospital, was shifted to the Coronary Care Unit from her cabin yesterday morning after her condition deteriorated.

Khaleda, 78, is suffering from different health complications, including a heart condition and liver disease.

Speaking at the Abdullahpur rally, her personal physician Prof AZM Zahid Hossain said the board formed for her treatment said her liver transplant is necessary. “That is why she needs to be sent to an advanced multi-disciplinary centre abroad immediately.”

In another development, Dhaka (south) city unit BNP held a rally in Jatrabari. Party standing committee members Mirza Abbas and Abdul Moeen Khan spoke at the event.

## Will keep promoting democracy, rule of law

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Hasina said, “People’s trust in the effectiveness and legitimacy of the international organisation is gradually being eroded. As a result, our overall progress towards a peaceful and prosperous common future is faced with threats.”

She said the impacts of the pandemic, the effects of an existential climate crisis, and the wide ramifications of the war in Ukraine affecting global food, financial, and energy securities have greatly impeded the achievement of SDGs in developing countries.

The PM deeply appreciated the UN secretary-general’s initiative to convene the “Summit of the Future” next year.

“We must make all efforts to collectively address the common challenges of humanity to secure a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future for all. And, for that, we must choose unity, solidarity, and multilateralism over fragmentation, insularity and isolation.”

**ROHINGYA CRISIS**

Hasina said Bangladesh had sheltered the Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds, but the situation has become really unbearable for the country.

“Uncertainty over repatriation has led to widespread frustration. This situation can potentially fuel

radicalisation. If the problem persists, it may affect the security and stability of the entire region, and beyond.

“The displaced Rohingyas want to return to their own country, Myanmar, and live a peaceful life there. Let’s bring those destitute people hope of a brighter future in their own land and thereby foster safety and stability in the region.”

About climate change, the PM said Bangladesh is one of the most climatically-vulnerable countries although it contributes to less than 0.47 percent of global emissions.

“The adverse effects of climate pose serious threats to the security and economic prosperity of our present and future generations. Urgent, bold and ambitious collective actions are needed to address these threats.”

The PM said the development needs of the climate-vulnerable countries must be considered. “We also demand an urgent operationalisation of the loss and damage funds as agreed in COP27.”

Hasina said Bangladesh will officially graduate to a developing country in 2026.

“I believe the ongoing multiple global crises will not derail our graduation trajectory. Yet, we reiterate our call to the development partners and the advanced economies to continue to support us during our transition to ease the impact of our

graduation.”

The PM said prices of food, energy and commodities have risen globally, weakening Bangladesh’s efforts to recover from the pandemic. “As an energy- and food-importing country, our import bills have shot up significantly, impacting on our foreign currency reserves.”

About the Palestine issue, Hasina said Bangladesh will continue its efforts to realise the rights of the people of Palestine. “Bangladesh will stand by Palestine.”

The PM said Bangladesh’s commitment to global peace and security is well manifested in its contribution to UN peacekeeping operations. She said 188,000 UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh have earned reputation for their professional excellence and impeccable performance.

Hasina said Bangladesh remains concerned at the continued prevalence of terrorist threats which are now taking new shapes due to misuse of ICT.

She said the recent incident of burning copies of the Holy Quran has shaken the conscience of Bangladesh.

“Such acts of perversion not only hurt religious sentiments of the Muslims, but also instigate violence and harm peaceful co-existence of people of various faiths and beliefs,” she added.

## Visa curbs slapped on law enforcers

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you impose visa restrictions on them?

**Lu:** This policy can impose these visa restrictions on anyone found to be undermining democratic elections. This could include vote rigging, voter intimidation, the use of violence to prevent people from exercising their rights to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly, and the use of measures designed to prevent political parties, voters, civil society, or the media from participating in the electoral process or expressing their views.

**DS:** What is the process of determining the people who face visa restrictions? How can we be sure that the process is foolproof?

**Lu:** The [State] Department determines an individual’s ineligibility under the policy based on extensive, well-resourced, and fact-checked case-by-case review of credible information about those undermining the democratic process in Bangladesh. We apply

this process equally and rigorously to government, opposition, and security services.

**DS:** Will it be applicable for their family members as well?

**Lu:** The immediate family members of such persons may also be found ineligible for entry into the United States under this policy.

**DS:** The Bangladesh Election Commission has not yet announced the date for the next parliamentary election. How can you impose visa restrictions even before the election?

**Lu:** This policy applies to the entire democratic election process, not just the election day. We may not know the exact date of the election, but it is clear that the electoral process is in full swing.

**DS:** US President Biden had a candid conversation with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of the G20 in Delhi. Hasina also attended a banquet hosted by President Biden in New York last Tuesday. Does this indicate the

easing of US-Bangladesh relations?

**Lu:** We have a dynamic, strong, and multi-faceted bilateral relationship with Bangladesh. The United States has been a critical partner in Bangladesh’s remarkable development journey – we have provided billions in assistance over the last 51 years.

We are helping Bangladesh combat its current dengue crisis. The United States is the biggest foreign investor in Bangladesh. Our security partnership is robust and enduring. We are by far the largest donor for the Rohingya refugee crisis – helping Bangladesh care for the largest refugee population in the world.

Last year, we celebrated 50 years of bilateral relations and look forward to deepening our engagement with Bangladesh over the next 50 years and beyond.

The United States wants what Bangladeshis themselves want: free and fair elections that are conducted in a peaceful manner.

## Sri Lanka repays entire Bangladeshi loan

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Sri Lanka has paid \$50 million to Bangladesh, the final instalment of a \$200 million loan taken under a currency swap agreement two years ago, a top Bangladesh Bank official said yesterday.

The government of the island nation also paid \$4.5 million as interest on the loan amount on Thursday, the official said.

Colombo repaid \$100 million on September 2 and \$50 million on August 17.

Sri Lanka paid back its loan as its embattled economy is staging a recovery from its worst economic crisis just a year ago. Its inflation rocketed to 69.8 percent in September last year. In July, however, inflation stood at 6.3 percent.

On the other hand, Bangladesh is facing a foreign exchange crisis after its reserve dropped sharply in the past one and a half years owing to higher import bills compared to lower-than-expected remittance and export earnings.

The gross forex reserve came down to \$21.45 billion on September 21 in line with the International Monetary Fund’s calculation formula, BB data showed.

## War crimes accused held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police arrested a fugitive accused of committing crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War in Mymensingh’s Ishwarganj upazila Thursday night.

Md Salimuddin, 90, is an accused in a case lodged with International Crimes Tribunal-1 for looting, killing, and torching houses.

He went into hiding soon after filing the case over two years ago.

Md Faruq Hossain, officer-in-charge of the Detective Branch (DB) of police in Mymensingh, said, acting on a tip-off, police raided the Sohagi Charpara area and arrested Salimuddin.

## Man held with 1.7kg gold at Ctg airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials recovered different sizes of gold weighing 1.7 kg worth Tk 1.5 crore from Chattogram’s Shah Amanat International Airport last morning.

The officials detained a passenger Mohammad Ali, hailing from Chattogram’s Hathazari, in this connection, said Ahsan Ullah, deputy commissioner of Customs House, Chattogram.

Ali arrived from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on a flight of Air Arabia that landed at the airport 7:30am, Ahsan Ullah told our Chattogram staff correspondent.

He was carrying the gold in an electric rice cooker recovered from his luggage, said the customs official.

## US taking steps to impose visa curbs on Bangladeshis

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Hasina is visiting the US to attend the UN General Assembly in New York. On Tuesday, she attended a banquet hosted by US President Joe Biden for global leaders. On Thursday, Hasina held a meeting with US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya and US Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu.

After yesterday’s announcement, Zeya wrote on X, formerly Twitter, “Secretary Blinken’s announcement affirms our commitment to free, fair & peaceful elections worldwide and supports efforts of government of Bangladesh partners, civil society and media to ensure democratic elections that reflect the will of Bangladeshi people.”

Earlier on May 24, Washington announced the visa policy against the backdrop of the alleged irregularities in the 2014 and 2018 elections. It came when the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP are at odds over the polls-time administration just ahead of the national elections due by January next year.

The government says the elections will be held under the current administration as per the constitution, but the opposition BNP is demanding an interim administration, arguing that a free and fair election is not possible under the current government.

In the visa policy announcement on May 24, Washington said the actions that undermine the democratic election process include vote rigging, voter intimidation, use of violence to prevent people from exercising their right to freedoms of association and peaceful assembly, and use of measures designed to prevent political parties, voters, civil society, or the media from disseminating their views.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken had then said the visa restriction is not directed against any particular political party, rather it targets individuals engaging in behaviour that undermines the democratic election process, regardless of affiliation.

Following the announcement, Awami League leaders had said BNP should be worried, as violence before or during the election may trigger visa restrictions. BNP leaders had welcomed it, saying the policy would play a supporting role in ensuring fair elections.

Contacted last night, Awami League’s International Affairs Secretary Shammii Ahmed said, “This is nothing new... I don’t think we have anything to worry.”

Reactions from BNP leaders were not immediately available.

Earlier on December 10, 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for alleged enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and tortures.

Over the last two years, top US officials made several visits to Bangladesh. They invariably spoke of free and fair elections, upholding human rights, media freedom and protection of human rights defenders.

## Heavy rain exposes

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Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, said the rains and subsequent flooding had presumably damaged goods worth crores of taka.

At many kitchen markets, traders could not open their shops even after the waters receded because the floors were covered in a thick layer of mud.

As incessant rains began to lash the city Thursday evening, the streets got inundated soon. Vehicles broke down in the middle of streets, resulting in congestion and gridlocks that in some places could not be cleared until the break of day.

People risked falling into manholes without lids as they waded through waist-deep water. Many were seen draining bucketfuls of water from their cars.

At a shop of retail chain RFL Best Buy in Shenpara, Mirpur, Mehedi Hasan, the manager, was draining water from his store after 3:00pm yesterday.

He said the electronics on the bottom shelves got damaged.

Grocery store owners in the area said their refrigerators went out of order because of the inundation.

Dhaka North City Corporation CEO Selim Reza said fixing the problem of waterlogging would take time because the canals through which water would have flowed to the rivers have been either clogged by garbage or filled up by encroachers.

Dhaka South City Corporation CEO Mizanur Rahman and Superintendent Engineer Khairul Baker could not be reached over the phone.