



Dhaka to work on labour rights at its own pace

Says Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will work at its own pace to improve labour rights, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday.

"We cannot be like America overnight -- we will work in our own way based on our reality," he told journalists when asked for his reaction to the US's memorandum on advancing worker empowerment, rights and high labour standards globally that was announced on Friday.

The US will work to hold accountable those who threaten, intimidate and attack union leaders, labour rights defenders and labour organisations, including using tools like sanctions, trade penalties and visa restrictions, said Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, while announcing the memorandum.

"We want to be there for people like Kalpona Akter, a Bangladeshi garment worker and activist, who says that she is alive today because the US embassy advocated on her behalf," Blinken said at the briefing.

The US is Bangladesh's second largest

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The charred interior of one of the three Jamuna Express carriages that were set on fire by unidentified miscreants early yesterday. Police said the incident occurred soon after the train left Sarishabari Railway Station in Jamalpur. Inset, the carriages ablaze.

PHOTO: SHAHIDUL ISLAM NIROB

'EC to ensure level playing field for all candidates'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission will ensure that activists of parties taking part in the upcoming national polls do not face "political harassment" and that a level playing field exists, said an election commissioner.

While talking to The Daily Star, two election commissioners said the EC would bring changes to the administration and police if there were specific allegations.

"In our country, the opposition always makes allegations regarding the set up of the administration [in favour of the ruling party]," Election Commissioner Md Alamgir said.

"Action can be taken if there are specific allegations and proof," he added.

He said the EC would leave no stone unturned to ensure a level playing field for all participating candidates.

Since October 28, the BNP and its allies have been calling blockades and strikes demanding the resignation of the government, reformations of the EC, and polls under a neutral interim administration.

At least 13,210 party leaders and activists were arrested across the

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BUSINESS

Exporters worried over US move on labour rights

Business leaders and apparel exporters are worried over a recent US presidential directive on labour rights situation while union leaders and trade analysts suggested bringing improvements to avert trade sanctions.

The opinions were sought by The Daily Star yesterday over US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken's statements on the labour rights situation in different countries on Thursday.

At the rollout of a Presidential Memorandum on "Advancing Worker Empowerment, Rights, and High Labour Standards Globally", Blinken said the US would hold accountable those who threaten, intimidate, and attack union leaders, labour rights defenders and labour organisations.

"I am worried about the fate of garment export from my factories as more than 90 percent of my shipment is destined for the US," said AK Azad, chairman of Ha-Meem Group.

STORY ON B1

Hamas battles Israeli forces in north Gaza

Hostage deal report denied; dozens killed in Israeli strikes on Bureij, Nusseirat refugee camps

AGENCIES

Hamas gunmen battled Israeli forces trying to push into Gaza's largest refugee camp yesterday and Israeli air strikes to the south killed dozens of Palestinians, witnesses said, as a US media report of a nascent hostage release deal was denied.

The Washington Post reported that Israel and Hamas had reached a tentative US-brokered agreement to free dozens of women and children held hostage in Gaza in exchange for a five-day pause in their war, citing people familiar with the matter.

But both Israel's prime minister and US officials said no agreement had been hammered out yet, with a White House spokesperson saying efforts were continuing to clinch a deal.

The Post's report came as Israel appeared to be preparing to expand its offensive against Hamas to densely populated Gaza's southern half after air strikes killed dozens of Palestinians, including civilians reportedly sheltering at two schools.

Witnesses reported heavy fighting overnight between Hamas gunmen and Israeli ground forces trying to advance into Jabalia, the largest of the enclave's camps with nearly 100,000 people, most of whom rejected Israeli appeals to evacuate to the south.

In the centre of the narrow coastal

enclave, Palestinian medics said 31 people were killed, including two local journalists, in Israeli air strikes on the Bureij and Nusseirat refugee camps.

The Red Crescent said at least two Palestinians were killed during Israeli

5,000 children.

A team led by the World Health Organization that visited Al Shifa, Gaza's biggest hospital on Saturday described it as a "death zone", days after Israeli forces seized the premises to root out an alleged



Gaza's Al Shifa hospital 'a death zone': WHO

31 premature babies evacuated from the hospital

Palestinian death toll reaches 12,300

Israeli raids kill two Palestinians in West Bank

army raids in the West Bank, reports Reuters.

As the conflict entered its seventh week, there was no sign of a let-up, despite international appeals for "humanitarian pauses" to enable untrammelled, safe deliveries of aid to civilians who lack food, drinking water and medical care.

Gaza's Health Ministry raised its death toll from the unrelenting Israeli bombardment to 12,300, including

Hamas command centre underneath it.

The WHO team reported signs of gunfire and shelling and a mass grave at Al Shifa's entrance, and the Gaza health official said yesterday 31 premature babies evacuated from the hospital.

After air-dropping leaflets earlier in the week, Israel on Saturday again warned civilians in parts of southern Gaza to relocate as it girds for an offensive from the north.

Webb reveals 'fluffy' planet where it rains sand droplets



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Astronomers have observed a "fluffy" planet around 200 light-years from Earth where it rains sand droplets from silicate clouds.

Data gathered using the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has revealed that WASP-107b -- which orbits a star in the constellation of Virgo -- has a dynamic atmosphere made up of water vapour, sulphur dioxide, and sand clouds.

Scientists say this exoplanet -- a planet outside the Solar System -- has a cloud cycle similar to Earth, except the droplets are made of sand instead of water vapour.

While clouds have been inferred on other exoplanets, the researchers said their work, published in the journal Nature, is the first instance where astronomers have been able to identify the chemical composition of clouds in a distant planet.

Study author Dr Achrene Dyrek, an astronomer at CEA -- a French government-funded research organisation in Paris, said, "JWST enables a deep atmospheric characterisation of an exoplanet that does not have any counterpart in our Solar System, we are unravelling new worlds!"

Ukrainian army advances at Dnipro river

Pushes Russian forces back from banks

AFP, Kyiv

The Ukrainian army yesterday said it pushed Russian forces back "three to eight kilometres" from the banks of Dnipro river, which if confirmed would be the first meaningful advance by Kyiv's forces months into a disappointing counteroffensive.

Ukrainian and Russian forces have been entrenched on opposite sides of the vast waterway in the southern Kherson region for more than a year, after Russia withdrew its troops from the western bank last November.

Meanwhile, drone attacks, a defining characteristic of the war in Ukraine, have intensified this week. Kyiv and Moscow were targeted Saturday night, though both sides claimed to have intercepted most of the attacks and no victims were reported.

According to the Russian defence ministry, a drone "was destroyed by the air defence equipment... over the territory of the Bogorodsky urban district, in the Moscow region".

Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow were particularly frequent in the spring, ahead of the launch of its counteroffensive in June, but they have been rare in recent weeks.

Kyiv was also targeted for a second night by a barrage of Iranian-made Shahed drones packed with explosives that were launched by Russian forces, local authorities said.



This picture taken from southern Israel shows smoke rising above buildings during an Israeli strike on the Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Man arrested over gang rape of woman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police yesterday arrested a man in a case filed over the gang rape of a woman in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila.

The arrestee was identified as Sakib Mia, 22, a resident of the upazila's Jayachandi area, said police.

According to the case statement, the victim's father's home is in Jayachandi. But she lives in Cumilla's Muradnagar with her husband.

On November 5, the victim's husband went to visit one of their relatives in Kulaura upazila. But he got the address wrong and ended up at the house of someone else, who thought he was a thief and confined him.

Later, locals from Jayachandi went to Kulaura and got him released. After they brought

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