

US reiterates commitment to help ensure free, fair polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Washington reiterated yesterday its commitment to collaborating with the government, opposition, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure a free and fair election.

The US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said that the US would engage with all stakeholders to encourage them to collaborate for the benefit of the Bangladeshi people and ensure free and fair elections that are conducted peacefully.

He made the comment at a media briefing in Washington, DC, yesterday when asked how the US assesses the current situation in Bangladesh, where the government is conducting elections "in an unprecedented manner by detaining 20-plus thousand opposition party leaders and activists" and the main opposition BNP is boycotting the election.

"I'm not going to speculate on the outcome of the elections," he said, adding that, as they have said several times before, they urge all the stakeholders to work together for a free and fair election.

The US, which declared a visa policy saying that those undermining the elections would face visa restrictions, has been calling for free and fair elections.

The state department also sent letters to the main political parties – the Awami League, BNP, and Jatiya Party – to hold dialogue without any preconditions. That has not, however, happened.

The government is now going ahead with the elections, with the BNP continuing to enforce strikes and blockades following the October 28 rally, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and instating a caretaker government – a demand that the ruling party rejects.

Mild to moderate cold wave likely this month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mild to moderate cold wave may sweep over the country at the end of December, said the Met Office.

In the long-term forecast for December, the Met Office said, the temperatures will be mostly above normal.

Meteorologists, however, say one or two mild to moderate cold waves may come in the last week of December, and the temperature may drop to eight to ten degrees Celsius.

Also, mild to moderate fog will occur at different places over the country during that time, the Met Office said.

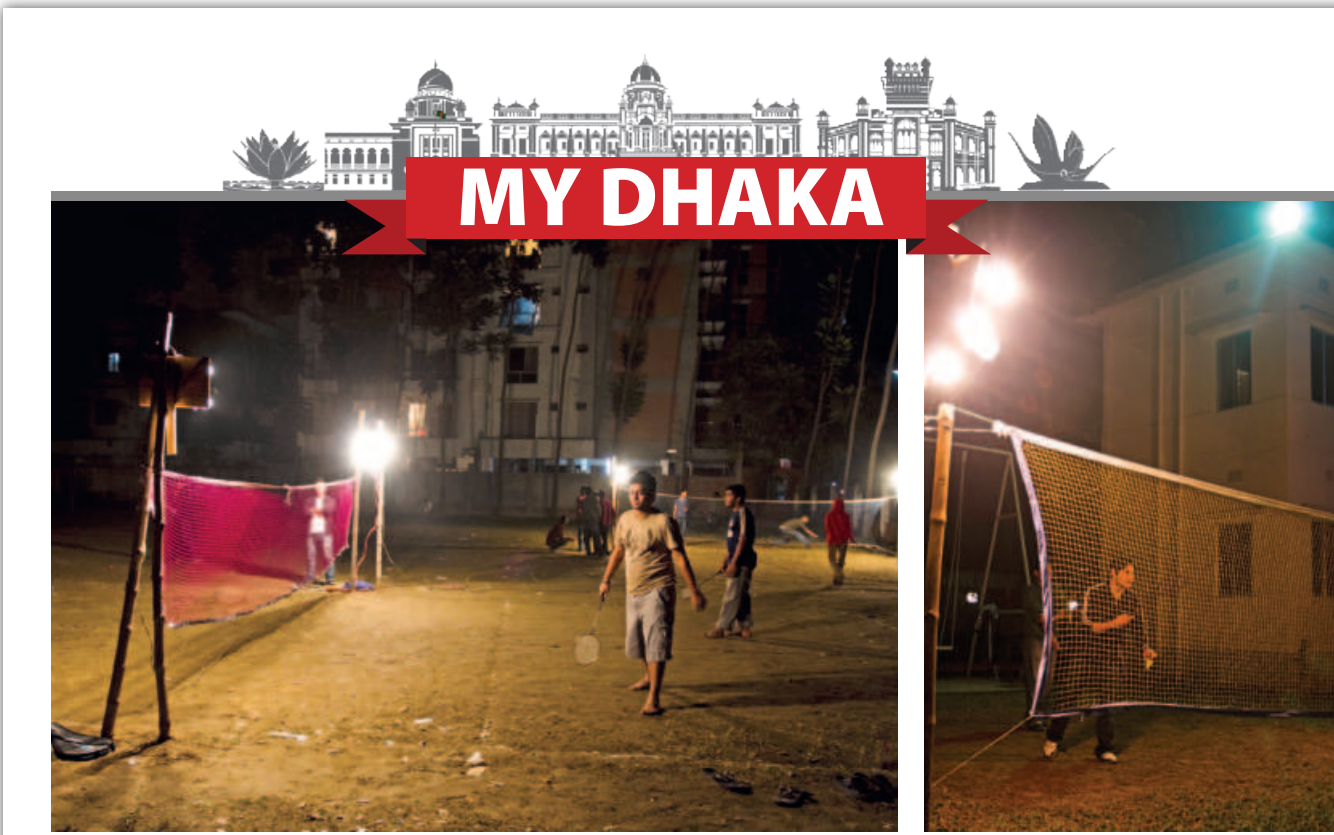


PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

Dhaka's love affair with WINTER BADMINTON

AYMAN ANIKA

As a season, winter has many distinctive charms, and badminton is certainly one of them. For many Dhakaiites, the arrival of the season serves as the perfect catalyst to dust off their badminton rackets and head to the nearest court. What was once a sporadic affair, becomes a routine as the cool weather arrives. The city comes alive with the rhythmic beat of shuttlecocks meeting rackets, and makeshift badminton courts spring up transforming open spaces into arenas of friendly competition.

Nowadays, children may not find many designated playgrounds to play badminton but this does not stop them from arranging friendly tournaments in the most unexpected places!

Rounak and Onik – 10 or 11 years old and residing in Shahjadpur, Dhaka – have turned quiet alleys and even rooftop terraces into the canvas for impromptu badminton matches along with other children from this area.

Rounak likes to play early in the morning and in the evening. He

mentions, "I like badminton more than cricket or football and in winter, other kids my age also become enthusiastic about this game as we get plenty of time to play for our winter vacation."

As the sun sets and the temperature drops, the allure of playing badminton under the starlit sky becomes irresistible. The courts take on a magical aura, illuminated by the soft glow of streetlights and the vibrant energy of the players. We see people setting up flood lights and these floodlit courts become the stage for thrilling matches that captivate both players and onlookers alike.

A professional badminton player, Mohammad Raihan, who is in his 20s, was seen displaying finesse and his skills with a bunch of teenagers. When asked if this game holds any special allure for him in winter, he replied, "I cherish the spirit that is palpable in this season as you can see families, friends, and even neighbours come together to partake in the joy of this game."

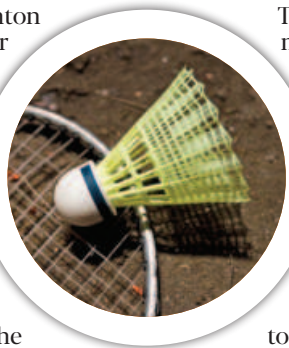
Truly, the unmistakable sound of shuttlecocks being volleyed back and forth becomes the soundtrack of the winter season, creating a harmonious resonance that reverberates across the city's nooks and crannies.

Talking about his fondest memories regarding badminton, Ferdous Utsho shares, "As I grew up in the city, courts or open spaces were not always available – either adults used it, or we had to put up makeshift courts (which is very tough) – so, my friends and I used to get up very early when these spaces were empty and played as long as we could."

For many, memories of winter badminton are woven into the fabric of their lives and it had been a celebration of togetherness. A fresh graduate, Fahim Ahmed Arko last played badminton when he was in college.

"I studied in a cantonment school, and for us, badminton had been the sport for winter. Though we weren't seasoned players, it was a great experience for us. We even arranged tournaments and played against our teachers!" he says.

The game is a respite from the monotony of the season, offering a blend of physical activity and social interaction. The joy of playing badminton in the winter is not confined to the court; rather it seeps into every aspect of our lives, creating memories that thaw the chill of winter and warm the heart long after the season has passed.



Police see dead man running

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Sheikh Mohammad Shamim, former Chhatra Dal leader of Gazipur City Corporation's Ward-54, is one such victim, who has nothing to do with the alleged crime but has been implicated nevertheless.

On October 26, police arrested him and 56 others from Tongi. Family members and sources in the court said Shamim was subsequently sent to jail.

But in a case filed on October 31 by Tongi police, Shamim has been charged with setting fire to a motorcycle and vandalising several vehicles in Tongi on October 30.

Contacted, SI Taim Uddin of Tongi West Police Station who filed the case said he would like to have a face-to-face conversation about the matter.

Al Amin Sarkar, a Jamaat supporter, from Brahmanbaria's Kasba is another.

On November 2, four days after BNP's Nayapaltan rally, Emdadul Haque Palash, former general secretary of local Chhatra League, sued 57 BNP-Jamaat leaders and supporters for "vandalising four bikes, beating him up and snatching Tk 2 lakh from him".

The alleged incident happened in Kasba municipality area at 7:40am.

Al Amin's immigration papers show he landed at Dhaka airport at 6:00am that day after performing Umrah in Saudi Arabia, where he flew on October 19.

Brahmanbaria is about 100km from Dhaka airport and is about four hours' journey.

Al Amin's wife Umme Habiba Fatema said her husband, a Jamaat supporter, came out of the airport around 8:30am after completing immigration formalities. The couple stayed at a cousin's house in Dhaka that night and the next day, and returned to Brahmanbaria on November 4.

Police arrested him from Kasba on November 5, she said.

In the same case, Emdadul named Deen Islam Bhuiyan as an accused although he was in prison at the time.

Deen Islam, 70, has been in jail since police arrested him on September 15 from Brahmanbaria, said his son Tanvir Bhuiyan.

Kasba Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Mohiuddin said a private citizen filed the case and that they would take appropriate measures after investigation.

Police in Magura filed two cases on November 1 and 3 against two men over political violence, when they were in Malaysia and Bahrain.

One of them is Alamin Kazi of Magura's Shalikhah, an expatriate businessman in Malaysia. The other is Rajib Sikder, an expat in Bahrain.

Travel documents, family members and both the expats confirm that they were not in Bangladesh on those dates.

"Like in 2013 and 2018, the government is trying to create panic among the people ahead of the election so they cannot take to the streets. Police are arresting our leaders and activists indiscriminately. They are employing such tactics so people do not rise up against the autocratic rule," Rizvi said.

Rights activist Nur Khan said police continue to file such cases as they are not held accountable for victimising innocent people.

"It is clear from the cases filed across the country that the accused are supporters of opposition parties. It shows that police are being used by the government for political gains," he said.

It also demonstrates police inefficiency, he said, adding, "Police have the list of opposition leaders and workers. So they use their names whenever they file a case without any verification."

Anwar Hossain, deputy inspector general (operations) at the Police

Headquarters, said there are strict instructions for the local police to verify case-related information before pressing charges against anyone.

"If police filed cases against dead men or people already in jail, it is wrong and unjust on the part of the officers concerned. We will ask the units concerned to investigate and if anyone is found guilty of filing such cases, actions will be taken against them as per the rules," he told The Daily Star.

According to Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua, courts need to intervene in these matters as such cases may erode public trust in the judiciary.

"It is a matter of concern. I think such cases are a clear threat to the judicial system," he said.

350 failed to prove

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the names of proposers and seconders who were not from the constituency concerned, 21 hid lawsuit-related information, eight hid information in affidavits, six did not submit educational certificates.

Candidature of Gono Front's Manikganj-1 candidate Shahjahan Khan, Narayanganj-2 independent Hazi Shariful Islam, Madaripur-2 independent Yousuf Ali Sumon, BNM's Manikganj-1 aspirant Monayem Khan, and Bangladesh Congress' Chattogram-8 nominee Mohibur Rahman Bulbul defaulted on paying credit card bills.

The EC, in a statement yesterday, said aspirants whose nominations were cancelled can file appeals with the commission by December 9.

The aspirants or their representatives will have to file the appeals at the Nirbachan Bhaban in the capital's Agargaon. The EC will dispose of the appeals from December 10 to 15.

Transcom chief Shahnaz Rahman

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In the female taxpayer category, Anwara Hossain, Nilufer Ferdous, Mituli Mahbub and Shaila Afrin Khandkar have been named among the other highest taxpayers in the assessment year 2022-23.

"We expect to recognise the highest taxpayers with tax cards at a ceremony this month," said a senior official of the NBR, which has been naming compliant taxpayers since FY2015-16 in an effort to encourage compliance in Bangladesh where evasion is believed to be rampant.

Bangladesh has roughly 94 lakh registered taxpayers but just over one-third filed returns on their incomes in the assessment year 2022-23.

Tax officials said the number of taxpayers should be higher in the view of the rising income and economic growth.

The tax authority launched the tax cards to honour compliant

taxpayers in 2010-11. It started with recognising 10 taxpayers each in individual and company categories. The NBR later revised the criteria as many honest taxpayers were left out.

Among individuals, the NBR now recognises compliant taxpayers in 18 categories, including senior citizens, businesspersons, young taxpayers, salaried persons, sportsmen, actors, singers, doctors, architects, engineers, lawyers and accountants.

Among companies, the revenue collector has been recognising 54 firms under 15 categories that also include banks, non-bank financial institutions, telecommunication firms, food and allied, garment and textile, energy, and pharmaceuticals.

In 2017, the NBR honoured the family of Latifur Rahman, the founder and former chairman of Transcom Group, as "Kar Bahadur" or tax icon family along with 83 other families from across the country.

Seat-sharing stuck with JSD, Workers Party

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The AL chief also ruled out the possibility of withdrawing the "independents of her party" from the race.

Sources in AL said the ruling party may share Bogura-4 with the JSD for its leader Rezaul Karim Tansen MP.

Workers Party and the JSD are bargaining for more seats, including Satkhira-1 for Mustafa Lutfullah MP of Workers Party and Feni-1 for Shirin Akhter MP, also the general secretary of JSD.

The ruling party has already conveyed the message to the JSD that it will not share Feni-1. The AL, however, offered that Shirin would be made MP from a reserved seat for women.

When the issue of sharing

Shirin's seat came up for discussion in yesterday's meeting, Amu said that AL nominee Alauddin Ahmed Chowdhury is Hasina's preferred candidate for Feni-1, said meeting sources.

Amu said the alliance partners will run with "boat", the AL's electoral symbol, from the seats to be shared. The partners will participate in the polls with their respective electoral symbols in the rest of the constituencies.

Emerging from the meeting, Inu told reporters that there were 10 candidates from the alliance partners in the last general election. He hoped the number would double in the January 7 national election.

"The candidates of the 14-party

BORDER KILLING

BSF returns body of Bangladeshi man

UNB, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has returned the body of a Bangladeshi man who they shot dead along the Rokanpur border in Gomostapur upazila of Chapainawabganj on Saturday.

BSF handed over the body of Rajibul Islam Rajan to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) during a bipartisan flag meeting at the Rokanpur border around 10:00pm on Monday, said Lt Col Sadikur Rahman, commanding officer, BGB-16 Battalion.

"The BSF handed over Rajan's body. Police and local public representatives of both countries were present at the time," he added.

Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Gomostapur Police Station, said the body was handed over to the relatives of the victim.

Matiur Rahman, chairman of Radhanagar union, said, "When Rajibul, along with some local people, went to the bordering area around 3:00am on Saturday, the BSF members opened fire on them, leaving Rajibul dead on the spot."

Girl, 5 others held over gang rape

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Police arrested five men and one teenage girl in a case filed over the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl in Chattoagram city's Madarbari area early yesterday.

The arrestees are Tamjidul Islam Rahim, 20, Nazrul Islam Minu, 36, Nazrul Islam Felon, 20, Junayed Hasan Munna, 22, Md Rakib, 22, and the victim's 16-year-old female friend.

Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Police (Kotwali Circle) Atanu Chawkrabarty told The Daily Star, "Police arrested the six after the victim's father lodged a written complaint with the Sadarghat Police Station against them."

The victim's female friend was complicit in the crime. She delivered the victim to the rapists, he added.

After learning of the matter, the victim's father went to the police and filed a complaint.

The victim was sent to the One Stop Crisis Centre at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) for medical attention.

Rohingya man shot dead in Ukhiya camp

UNB, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya man was shot dead by unidentified criminals at a refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Imam Hossain, 30, a resident of Ukhiya Rohingya camp no. 4.

Shamim Hossain, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said a group of criminals opened fire on Imam, leaving him dead on the spot.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue.

Police said he might have been killed over establishing supremacy.

Two killed by Russian shelling in Kherson: Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday that two people had been killed by Russian shelling in the southern city of Kherson, the latest fatalities in months of persistent shelling by Moscow's forces.

The city was recaptured by Ukrainian forces just over one year ago but has been shelled constantly by Russian forces on the opposite side of the Dnipro river that runs next to the city.

"In the morning, the Russian army mercilessly shelled the centre of Kherson. The occupiers killed two people," said Oleksandr Prokudin, the head of the Kherson region.

Medical workers who arrived on the scene confirmed that two residents had been killed, Prokudin said, adding that a 59-year-old man was hospitalised.

Prokudin also distributed images showing a blood-stained sidewalk and the blurred body of one of the victims.