



Palestinians walk past stalls set up in a street in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday as Muslims prepare for the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia stepping up war on its own people

CNN ONLINE

On February 26, one of Russia's longest serving human rights activists stood up at the end of his trial in a Moscow court and offered his uncensored verdict on Russian democracy.

"The state in our country is once again controlling not only social, political and economic life, but is now claiming full control over culture, scientific thought, and is inserting itself in private life. It's becoming all-pervasive," said Oleg Orlov, a 70-year-old who was on trial for "discrediting the army."

Powerful voices like Orlov's are becoming a rarity in Russia, where high-profile opponents to President Vladimir Putin and his ruling elite are now mostly either in exile, in prison, or dead.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 accelerated a process already two decades in the making — the erosion of democratic freedoms, media independence and civil society at home. With the war now in its third year, and Putin set to be re-installed

for a fifth term in a tightly-controlled election next week, there are signs that this process is picking up speed once again.

Orlov, co-founder and co-chair of Memorial, a Nobel Prize-winning human rights organisation set up in the Soviet Union's twilight years, knew he had nothing to lose.

The day after his speech in court, he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. Discrediting the army is just one of several new offenses added to Russia's penal code since the invasion of Ukraine.

Orlov's so-called crime was committed just over a year earlier, when he published an article in a French online newspaper titled "They Wanted Fascism, They Got It." After his sentencing, Amnesty International called him a "prisoner of conscience" and called for his immediate release. Russian human rights group OVD-Info says more than 260 people are currently serving jail terms in the country for crimes related to taking an anti-war stance. The group has recorded almost 20,000 detentions, and

while most of those were at the beginning of the war, there is still a steady stream. They're not large numbers in a country of 140 million people, said OVD-Info lawyer and analyst Darya Korolenko, but just enough to make for an effective deterrent.

And it's not just known opposition figures or activists who are being targeted.

"They will imprison old people, they will imprison people who have disabilities. They will imprison people with children, women with children," Korolenko told CNN. "They just want everyone to be silent."

The wartime censorship laws — discrediting the army, or the more serious offense of knowingly spreading "false" information about the army — have turned social media into a minefield. Platforms are closely monitored by the FSB, which acts as Russia's secret service, said Konstantin Eggert, an exiled Russian journalist who was among many added to Russia's ever-growing list of "foreign agents" last year. He believes the grip on social media will tighten further.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A Tibetan girl with her face painted participates in a protest march held to mark the 65th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule, in the northern hill town of Dharamsala, India yesterday.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Man arrested for crashing car into the gates

AFP, London

Officers arrested a man who crashed a car into the gates of London's Buckingham Palace over the weekend, police said yesterday.

The Metropolitan Police said the car "collided with the gates" of the royal residence at 02:30 GMT on Saturday.

Armed officers arrested the man at the scene on suspicion of criminal damage and he was taken to hospital, a spokesperson for the force said.

They added that no one was injured and enquiries were ongoing to establish the circumstances, the spokesperson added.

Infrastructure needed to utilise Matarbari port

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Japan and Bangladesh also share their position on free, open, secure and international rules-based order, he said, adding that the two countries elevated their relationship to a strategic level.

Matarbari has immense potential for Bangladesh's economic prosperity and could play a pivotal role in regional connectivity, he said.

Besides, there should be industries to make use of the port, he added.

Japan and Bangladesh have made significant progress towards this end including the introduction of direct flight between Narita and Dhaka, development of Dhaka

Metro rail, EPZ in Araihaazar and the 3rd terminal at the Dhaka airport, he said.

Businesses and other stakeholders have high expectations from the Matarbari port. Many are recommending development of connectivity with West Bengal, Nepal, Bhutan, and Northeast India.

"Expanding the circle of cooperation is important to realise the concept," he said.

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma said given the geographical proximity, Bangladesh is best positioned to tap into the abundant economic potentials of India's northeast. "We believe that

Bangladesh can be a driver of our northeast's economic development... We believe in a complete transformation of the regional economy.

"Japan is a valuable partner in our development agenda of the sub-region ...

"Matarbari Deep Sea Port is an obvious example, and operationalisation of land customs station connecting Ramgarh in Khagrachhari to Sabroom in Tripura and infrastructure in the northeast will bring the region's states much closer," he said.

State Minister for Commerce Ahasanul Islam Titu said Bangladesh would be facing challenges in the post-LDC era and sought

support for improving automation in the ports.

Former foreign secretary Shahidul Haque said regional stability and peace are of great importance for prosperity, and all need to consider this as a high priority.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun, Research Fellow Syed Yusuf Saadat, JICA Bangladesh Chief Representative Ichiguchi Tomohide, Tokyo University professor Kemmei Tsubota, BIMSTEC Secretary General Inda Mani Pandey, Japan External Trade Organisation Chief Country Representative Yuji Ando, PRAN-RFL Group Director Uzma Chowdhury, Conveyor Logistics Ltd Chairman Kabir Ahmed also spoke.

INDIAN ELECTION COMMISSION

High-ranking official resigns ahead of polls

REUTERS, New Delhi

The second-highest official in India's election commission resigned abruptly on Saturday, days ahead of the expected announcement of the date of the country's general election. Arun Goel's resignation as election commissioner leaves the Election Commission of India with only one of its three mandated top officials in their posts to conduct the world's largest election with more than 960 million registered voters. The Ministry of Law and Justice said in a gazette notification that Indian President Droupadi Murmu had accepted Goel's resignation, without citing a reason for his departure. Goel, who took over as election commissioner in November 2022, did not immediately answer calls from Reuters, and a commission spokesperson said he did not know why Goel had stepped down. Opinion polls have predicted an easy win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the election due by May, which would give him a rare third straight term in office. The election commission's decisions are taken by majority vote among three commissioners, each with a tenure of six years or up to the age of 65 years, according to its website. The electoral body is now left only with Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, after Anup Chandra Pandey retired as a commissioner last month, and Goel's resignation drew expressions of concern from several opposition parties. "India now has only ONE Election Commissioner, even as ... elections are to be announced in few days. Why?" asked Mallikarjun Kharge, president of the main opposition Congress party, on the X social media platform. He said India needs to stop "the systematic decimation of our independent institutions". It was not immediately clear if new commissioners could be appointed in time for the election. Election commissioners are appointed by a panel led by the prime minister, with the leader of opposition in the lower house of parliament and a federal minister nominated by the prime minister acting as its members.

Look, I'm not a young guy. That's no secret. But here is the deal. I understand how to get things done for the American people



US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

Eastern Bank PLC.

REGISTERED ADDRESS: 100 GULSHAN AVENUE, GULSHAN, DHAKA-1212, BANGLADESH

INFORMATION SENSITIVE TO SHARE PRICE

Recommendation for Cash Dividend & Stock Dividend for the year 2023

This is to notify for information of all concerned that the Board of Directors of Eastern Bank PLC. (EBL) in the Board Meeting held on Sunday, March 10, 2024 between 3:00 PM to 5:30 PM considered and approved the Audited Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 2023 and recommended for Payment of Cash Dividend & Issuance of Stock Dividend for the year ended December 31, 2023 to the Shareholders as given below :

- Cash Dividend @ 12.50 % (Twelve Point Five Zero Percent)
- Stock Dividend @ 12.50% (Twelve Point Five Zero Percent)

1. The Board also disclosed the following information from the Audited Financial Statements for the year 2023, comparing them to those of the previous year, 2022:

Particulars	Bank		Group	
	2023	2022	2023	2022
Net Asset Value (NAV) in Crore BDT	3,976.74	3,504.54	4,052.59	3,576.16
Net Asset Value Per Share in BDT (2022 restated)	32.94	29.03	33.57	29.62
Earnings Per Share (EPS) in BDT (2022 restated)	5.06	4.23	5.07	4.24
Net Operating Cash Flow Per Share (NOCFPS) in BDT (2022 restated)	8.03	10.27	7.91	10.30

Reasons for recommendation of stock dividend:

- Stock dividend has been recommended to strengthen the capital base of the Bank (EBL) in order to support projected business growth and to improve certain regulatory ratios.
- Stock Dividend is recommended out of accumulated profit; and
- Stock Dividend is not recommended from capital reserve or revaluation reserve or any unrealized gain or out of profit earned prior to incorporation of EBL or through reducing paid-up capital or through doing anything so that the post dividend retained earnings become negative or a debit balance.

2. The Board also decided to hold the 32nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Company (EBL) as per following schedule:

Day & Date	: Monday, April 29, 2024
Time	: 11.00 AM (Bangladesh Standard Time)
Record Date	: Tuesday, April 02, 2024 (In lieu of Book Closure)

3. Dividend Entitlement: The Shareholders whose names would appear in the Register of Members of the Company (EBL) and/or in the Depository Register on the 'Record Date' (April 02, 2024) will be eligible to join the 32nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) and to receive the Dividends.

By order of the Board of Directors

Dated: March 10, 2024
Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Md. Abdullah Al Mamun FCS
Company Secretary

Notes:

- All Hon'ble Shareholders of EBL are requested to update their respective BO Accounts [Mailing Address, Electronic Mail (e-Mail), Bank Account details, Taxpayer's Identification Number (e-TIN), Contact Number etc.] through Depository Participant (DP) latest by April 01, 2024 (Before Record Date).
- As per Income Tax Act 2023, 15% tax will be deducted from Cash Dividend for the Shareholders without having e-TIN (10% will be deducted for those having e-TIN).
- The concerned Depository Participants (DP) are requested to provide us detailed information (both soft & hard copies) of their margin loan holders (if any) within April 18, 2024 who hold shares of the Bank as on 'Record Date' (April 02, 2024) to the Share Department or through email at sharedepartment@ebl-bd.com
- The Annual Report for the year 2023 of the Bank (EBL) will be accessible on the Bank's website, www.ebl.com.bd within the specified timeframe. Additionally, it will be distributed to Shareholders via email addresses available to us as on the Record Date (April 02, 2024).