

POST-COUP MYANMAR Polls may not be held nationwide Says junta chief

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar may not be able to hold its next election nationwide, the country's junta chief admitted in comments published yesterday, as the military struggles to contain escalating violence against its rule.

The military has made numerous pledges to hold elections since it seized power in February 2021, but has repeatedly extended a state of emergency as it battles opponents across swathes of the country.

Junta supremo Min Aung Hlaing said officials were currently focusing on verifying voter lists, reiterating that polls could only come once peace was restored.

"If the state is peaceful and stable, we have a plan to hold the election in relevant sections as much as we can, even if the election is not held nationwide under the law," he said in an interview with TASS news agency.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Rafah, the last refuge for about half of Gaza's 2.3 million population after many people arrived in search of shelter after being displaced by fighting elsewhere, came under heavy fire in the latest Israeli attacks.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump wins pause of \$454m civil fraud ruling

REUTERS, New York

Donald Trump won a bid to pause his \$454 million civil fraud judgment if he posts a \$175 million bond within 10 days, a victory for the former US president that blocks New York state authorities from beginning to seize his assets as soon yesterday.

A mid-level state appellate court granted Trump's request to delay enforcement of a February 16 judgment against him for overstating his net worth and the value of his real estate properties to dupe investors and lenders while it considers his appeal in the case.

The decision eases an acute cash crunch brought on by Trump's mounting legal expenses.

The attorney general's office and Trump's lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Trump, seeking to regain the presidency this year, had said on social media that he could be forced to sell assets at potentially "fire sale prices" to post bond in the case pursued by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Barred from North Gaza aid deliveries: UNRWA Israel threatens to stop working with the UN agency

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The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees has said that Israel had definitively barred it from making aid deliveries in northern Gaza, where the threat of famine is highest.

"Despite the tragedy unfolding under our watch, the Israeli Authorities informed the UN that they will no longer approve any @UNRWA food convoys to the north," Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the agency, said later on Sunday on X.

"This is outrageous & makes it intentional to obstruct lifesaving assistance during a man made famine."

Israel fired back, saying yesterday that UNRWA "has long forsaken its role in facilitating aid to northern Gaza. While we've been working with aid orgs and other UN agencies to facilitate large amounts of aid to the north."

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, said Israel "goes to great lengths to facilitate aid to northern Gaza, including by opening a new crossing in northern Gaza".

UNRWA director of communications

Juliette Touma told AFP the decision not to approve deliveries to the north had been relayed in a meeting with Israeli military officials on Sunday.

It followed two denials in writing for convoy deliveries to the north last week. No reason for the decision was given, Touma said.



Gaza faces dire humanitarian conditions as a result of Israel's offensive that began nearly six months ago. Israel's military campaign has killed more than 32,333 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Last week a UN-backed food security

assessment warned that famine was projected to hit the north of Gaza by May unless there was urgent intervention.

UNRWA has not been able to deliver food to the north since January 29, Touma said.

"The latest decision is another nail in the coffin" for efforts to get desperately needed aid to Gazans reeling from war, Touma said.

Martin Griffiths, head of the UN humanitarian coordination office, said on X on Sunday that UNRWA "is the beating heart of the humanitarian response in Gaza".

"The decision to block its food convoys to the north only pushes thousands closer to famine. It must be revoked," he added.

Meanwhile, Israel will stop working with the UN Relief Works Agency in the Gaza Strip, a government spokesperson said yesterday, accusing the aid agency of perpetuating conflict.

"UNRWA are part of the problem, and we will now stop working with them. We are actively phasing out the use of UNRWA because they perpetuate the conflict rather than try and alleviate the conflict," spokesperson David Mencer told reporters.

LOK SABHA POLLS Prominent Indians flocking to Modi's party

REUTERS, New Delhi

A billionaire industrialist and a former Indian Air Force chief on Sunday became the latest prominent figures, including a judge and an ambassador, to join Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party in recent weeks as it seeks to widen its lead over the opposition. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is widely expected to win a third straight term in elections starting next month, as the opposition struggles to stay together while its leaders are embroiled in various corruption investigations. Analysts say the wave of new joiners, many from the main opposition Congress party that has ruled India for more than five decades, indicates the inevitability of another BJP win. Naveen Jindal, head of Jindal Steel and Power JNSPNS and a two-time Congress parliamentarian, followed the country's last air force chief, Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria, in joining the BJP late on Sunday. Moments after he quit Congress, the BJP said Jindal would contest the upcoming election from his home state of Haryana for the party. "To fulfill the resolve of Prime Minister Modi for a developed India, famous industrialist, sportsperson and politician Naveen Jindal joined the BJP today," BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde told a press conference, with Jindal by his side.

Independence Day

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multi-coloured miniature flags and festoons.

Today is a public holiday. The 'National Martyrs' Memorial at Savar will be the main venue of the day's celebration.

The president and the prime minister will place wreaths early in the morning to pay homage to the martyrs.

People from all walks of life, including families of Bir Shreshthas, war wounded freedom fighters, members of the diplomatic corps, leaders of different political parties, social, cultural and professional bodies, will also lay wreaths at the national memorial.

National dailies will bring out special supplements while Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, private radio stations and television channels will air special programmes on the Liberation War and highlighting the significance of the day.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Bangla Academy, National Museum, Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh Shishu Academy and other social

and cultural organisations will arrange discussions. Cultural programmes, sports competitions, painting competitions for children, essay and debate competitions will also be organised.

Liberation War-based documentaries and movies will be screened at cinema halls across the country.

In the wake of the military crackdown, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who became the undisputed leader of the then Pakistan following the massive victory of his party, Awami League, in the 1970 general election, declared the independence of Bangladesh through the then EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) wireless at 00:30 hours on March 26 (the night following March 25) in 1971 at his Dhanmondi Road-32 residence.

He also called upon the people to build up strong resistance against the Pakistan occupation forces. The Pakistan military junta, to stop the legitimate movement of the Bangalees, arrested Bangabandhu that night.

Dhaka, Thimphu seek to scale up cooperation

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Bangladesh has increased the number of Bhutanese students' admission to MBBS course in public medical colleges to 30 from 22 annually. It has also offered two spots for the Bhutanese foreign service officials at the Foreign Service Academy each year.

Dhaka has also proposed assisting Thimphu in setting up a diplomatic training institute in Bhutan and providing special training to three batches of 7-10 Bhutanese officials each year at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

Dhaka also gifted Bangladesh-made tabs and laptops to Thimphu for capacity building and skill development of the Bhutanese government officials, said the joint statement.

"Both sides agreed that the two countries can work together in the post-graduation context to collaborate with each other for addressing the related challenges to ensure greater benefits for the peoples of the two countries," read the statement.

Bhutan recently graduated out of the LDC list, while Bangladesh will graduate in 2026.

Bangladesh and Bhutan inked the Agreement on the Movement of

Traffic-in-Transit and its protocol in March last year, which the two sides said will be phenomenal for bilateral trade and also work as a platform for paving the way for an interconnected South Asia.

The two countries also signed the Preferential Trade Agreement for facilitating trade.

Bhutan appreciated that Bangladesh has offered it the Special Economic Zone in Kurigram, 190 kilometres off Bhutan's southern city of Gelephu.

"The economic zone will add a new horizon in the area of bilateral trade and investment between the two countries and also for achieving greater prosperity in the South Asia region," the statement said.

Bangladesh proposed importing hydroelectricity from Bhutan, and a trilateral agreement between Bangladesh, Bhutan and India is needed for that.

Dhaka University economics professor Selim Raihan said Bangladesh has been keen to foster sub-regional cooperation with Nepal and Bhutan, who also want the same for having access to the Bay of Bengal.

"Here, India needs to come forward as its land will be used for transport, trade or energy cooperation," he told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh has helped advance India's vision of regional connectivity and India too should reciprocate with Bangladesh allowing Dhaka to use of its land for connecting Bhutan and Nepal, he added.

Yesterday morning, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and the first lady received the king and his entourage members at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. He was accorded a red carpet reception.

The king paid tributes to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi.

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud met the king at InterContinental Dhaka, the latter's place of residence.

Today, the king will visit the National Memorial at Savar and Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka. He will also have a meeting with the president at the Bangabhaban at 4:30pm. The president will host iftar and a dinner in honor of the king.

Tomorrow, the Bhutanese king will visit Padma Bridge and Bangladesh Special Economic Zone in Araihasar, Narayanganj. On Thursday, Jigme Khesar will visit Kurigram Special Economic Zone before leaving for Bhutan through Sonahat Land Port.

All aspirants must submit

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Online submission means candidates need not go to offices of returning officers anymore. So, the electoral code would not be breached, Ashok said.

He added that it was alleged that candidates in some areas during the previous local government elections were prevented from submitting nomination papers or were forced to withdraw. "That will not happen if the nomination forms are submitted online."

Earlier, the EC kept the scope for online nomination paper submission during some city corporation elections, the 12th national polls, and some by-elections to parliamentary seats. But it got lukewarm response.

Ashok hoped that this time the scenario would be different.

The EC will hold the first phase of the upazila elections at 152 upazilas in 59 districts on May 8. The last date for submission of nomination papers is April 15.

This time, the polls to 481 upazilas would be conducted in four phases.

The second phase will be on May 23, the third phase on May 29 and the fourth phase on June 5, said Ashok.

416 factories

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discussed different issues at the meeting on payment to the garment workers ahead of Eid.

"The year 2024 is another difficult year for us - many people may not see this, but now even the owners of good factories are in problems," said Abdullah Hil Rakib, the vice-president elect of the BGMEA.

The factory owners do not want to keep the salary and bonus unpaid, he added.

The control room and hotline will remain active for 24 hours from 7 days before Eid to deal with any situation (01320-170098).

Plotters are still out

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she said.

"The only obstacle on their way is the Awami League. If the Awami League can be annihilated or weakened by any trick, the rise of the defeated forces is inevitable. So, be careful," she said.

Hasina called on the people to take the country forward overcoming all evil tricks and conspiracies.

"On the 54th Independence Day, let's come forward in unison and take the development and progress of Bangladesh forward," she said.

The prime minister said she has tirelessly been trying to put smiles on the faces of the people by improving their fortunes with support and cooperation from all.

She said that her government has successfully been able to fulfil the expectations of the people to a large extent.

"Today, Bangladesh is a shining example in the developing world for socio-economic development," said Hasina.

She said her government proved that a country can be taken forward with political will, proper plans and limited resources.

"We've no master rather we've friends," she said, adding that the Bangalee nation will never be

browbeaten by anyone.

The Awami League president thanked the people for having confidence in her party.

She said Awami League has been governing the country for the past 15 years with the mandate of the people.

But this 15 year journey was not entirely a bed of roses, she said, citing different natural and manmade disasters and wars.

She said Bangladesh is now the 35th largest economy in the world.

About the commodity prices during Ramadan, she said the government has stockpiled several goods such as sugar, chickpeas, pulse, and edible oil alongside permitting the import of 50,000 tonnes of onion and the same amount of potatoes.

Besides, fish, meat, egg and milk are being sold at affordable prices for the marginalised people at 25 points in the capital since the beginning of Ramadan, she said.

She said the government has made a special allocation of 1,00,628 tonnes of rice for one crore families this Eid. Each family will get 10kg rice for free, she said.

"When the price of goods increases, the people, especially those with limited income, suffer. We're trying our best to ease people's suffering," she said.

Fatah official seeks Dhaka's support for

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The secretary general expressed his thanks and gratitude for the Bangladesh government's stances in support of the Palestinian cause, including support at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Jibril Rajoub made the remark when he met Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday and exchanged views on the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The secretary general apprised him of the ongoing Israeli atrocities

in Gaza and the West Bank, leading to an unprecedented genocide, infrastructure destruction, and restricting access to humanitarian assistance, resulting in famine in Gaza.

During the meeting, the secretary general informed him about the Israeli prime minister's illegal new annexation plan for post-war Gaza by establishing new settlements in Gaza and imposing Israeli Occupation Forces' control over Gaza, the West Bank, and beyond.

The foreign minister expressed his deepest sympathy for the civilian

casualties, including children and women, and the hardships in the difficult humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Hasan Mahmud called upon the international community to make a concerted effort to stop this war and called for an immediate ceasefire with adequate humanitarian access to Gaza and the West Bank.

He also reassured the secretary general that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's robust stance for the cause of Palestine on the international platform will continue.