

MYANMAR CRISIS

Junta chief takes on acting president role

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's acting president has taken medical leave and transferred his duties to military chief Min Aung Hlaing, the junta said on Monday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in 2021, deposing the government of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Acting president U Myint Swe "took sick leave and is getting treatment according to his current health situation", the junta's information team said in a statement.

"Acting president duties have been handed over... to the chairman of State Administration Council," he said, using the name the junta calls itself.

Myint Swe was vice president under the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi that the military ousted in 2021.

He was later appointed acting president by the junta.

He had been suffering "psychomotor retardation and malnutrition," state media said on Friday.



A Palestinian woman and a little girl ride on a donkey cart laden with their worldly goods, as thousands of Palestinians who fled following the Israeli army's evacuation order for parts of Khan Yunis, including the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone, arrive in another area of the southern Gaza city yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US Secret Service chief resigns

AFP, Washington

US Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle resigned yesterday, a day after acknowledging that the agency failed in its mission to prevent an assassination attempt against Donald Trump.

Cheatle was facing bipartisan calls to step down after a 20-year-old gunman wounded the former Republican president and current White House candidate at a July 13 campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"It is overdue, she should have done this at least a week ago," Mike Johnson, Republican Speaker of House of Representatives, said.

Blinken heads to SE Asia to reaffirm ties with strategic allies

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken heads to Southeast Asia this week to deepen ties with Washington's strategic allies, an official said Monday, as the United States seeks to bolster its regional stance against an increasingly assertive China.

On a 10-day trip that will see him visit Vietnam, Laos, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Mongolia, Blinken will carry a message of US commitment to its allies in the region, said Daniel Kritenbrink, a senior US State Department official.

"We're deepening our bilateral relationships, we're expanding our allied and partner relationships, which have reached unprecedented heights, and we are creating a latticework of mutually reinforcing partnerships together," he said.



The United States has in recent years significantly increased its engagement with several countries in Southeast Asia, particularly those locked in territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea.

Blinken's tour will include his participation in an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) ministerial meeting in Laos, where he will also meet with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines.

President Joe Biden has made expanding US alliances in the region a core part of his administration's foreign policy, and Kritenbrink said there was "strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill for our allies and partners and our approach to the region."

Under Biden, Washington has doubled down on its engagement in what it terms the "Indo-Pacific" region, upgrading ties with several

countries in the region and forming the so-called "Quad" alliance, which includes the United States, Japan, Australia and India.

Blinken's visit to Asia will be his 18th to the region since he took office more than three years ago.

"The message that the Secretary is going to be conveying to the region is that America is all in on the Indo-Pacific," said Kritenbrink.

Blinken will begin his six-nation tour in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, where he will attend the funeral of late communist leader Nguyen Phu Trong which is scheduled to begin tomorrow.

Trong died last week at a military hospital in Hanoi "due to old age and serious illness" at the age of 80.

In Laos, the US Secretary of State will participate on Friday and Saturday in the Asean ministerial meeting, where he will also meet Foreign Minister Wang.

Neither the United States nor China has confirmed whether the meeting will be a full bilateral sit-down or a less formal exchange.

POST-WAR GAZA PLAN

Hamas announces 'unity' deal with Palestinian rivals

AFP, Beijing

Hamas announced yesterday that it had signed an agreement in Beijing with other Palestinian organisations including rivals Fatah to work together for "national unity", with China describing it as a deal to rule Gaza together once the offensive ends.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who hosted senior Hamas official Musa Abu Marzuk, Fatah envoy Mahmud al-Aloul and emissaries from 12 other Palestinian groups, said they had agreed to set up an "interim national reconciliation government" to govern post-offensive Gaza.

"Today we sign an agreement for national unity and we say that the path to completing this journey is national unity. We are committed to national unity and we call for it," Abu Marzuk said after meeting Wang and the other envoys.

China has sought to play a mediator role in the conflict, which has been rendered even more complex due to the intense rivalry between Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, and Fatah, which partially governs the occupied West Bank.

Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it destroys Hamas, and world powers including key Israeli backer the US have scrambled to imagine scenarios for the governance of Gaza once the offensive ends.

India on \$24bn jobs drive in Modi's first post-polls budget

AFP, Mumbai

India's government will spend \$24 billion on employment and training, it said yesterday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks to address uneven economic growth and mollify disgruntled voters after a surprising election setback last month.

The funding will be used over five years for a package of five schemes and initiatives to "facilitate employment, skilling and other opportunities" for more than 40 million young people, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her annual budget speech.

Some will go on "employment-linked incentives" for companies, which the government hopes will create jobs.

"The global economy, while performing better than expected, is still in the grip of policy uncertainties," Sitharman said.

"In this context, India's economic growth continues to be the shining exception and will remain so in the years ahead," she added.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell short of an outright majority in recent national elections.

Ctg student, 2 others die from wounds

FROM PAGE 12

based solely on hospital sources.

Hridoy was a residential student of CU's Shah Amanat dormitory, reports our Chattogram correspondent.

With his death, six people were killed in clashes in Chattogram.

Victim's friend Tahmina Firuz Hasan said Hridoy was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital on July 18 evening after being hit by bullets and later he was moved to Park View Hospital's ICU. The next day, the doctors referred him to Dhaka for better treatment.

Youngest among two siblings, Hridoy hailed from Patuakhali Sadar upazila. Losing his only son, Ratan Chandra Tarua and Archana Rani became shell shocked, reports our Patuakhali correspondent.

About the death of another youth, Ahad Ali, officer-in-charge of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station, said police received the body from the neurosciences hospital and sent it to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

He sustained head injuries during

clashes in the capital's Uttara, the OC said.

Shuvo Shil, 24, who had bullet wounds in clashes between agitators and law enforcers at Savar on Saturday, died at Savar Enam Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Yousuf Ali, manager of the hospital, confirmed the death.

According to him, another youth Faruk, 24, who was hit by bullets during Saturday's clash, breathed his last early Sunday.

Faruk was among Sunday's 14 deaths.

WHO sounds alarm

FROM PAGE 12

Gaza City, with four others killed in the Jabalia refugee camp.

At least 39,090 people have been killed since the Israeli offensive began on October 7. The toll includes 84 deaths in 24 hours, according to the Gaza health ministry figures.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under pressure to reach a truce and hostage-release deal, arrived in Washington to address the US Congress today.

Netanyahu will meet US President Joe Biden tomorrow. In late June, Netanyahu said the offensive "in its intense phase" was about to end.

The evacuation order for Gaza's Al-Mawasi area came just two months after the military directed Palestinians

there for their own safety.

"Due to the Israeli occupation's attacks and massacres in Khan Yunis governorate from the early hours of this morning until now, 70 people have been martyred and more than 200 wounded," the Gaza health ministry said.

The Israeli military did not offer comment on the toll when asked by AFP. But in a statement, the military said its fighter jets and tanks "struck and eliminated terrorists in the area".

It said forces targeted more than "30 terror infrastructure" sites in Khan Yunis. Israeli warplanes also hit a weapons storage facility, observation posts, tunnel shafts and structures used by Hamas, it added.

Prof Yunus' statement anti-state

FROM PAGE 2

reforms protests left at least 150 people dead and several hundred injured.

On Friday, the government declared curfew and deployed armed forces to help the civil administration restore normalcy.

The US State Department spokesperson on Monday condemned the reported shoot-on-sight orders and called for those to be rescinded.

"We said everywhere in the world police take action if they come under attack.... [In Bangladesh] police had no other option but to open fire when they came under attack, houses and properties were destroyed or set on fire."

The minister said some vested quarters are spreading rumours abroad amid the internet outage at home. The foreign ministry has instructed the Bangladesh missions abroad to send messages to the Bangladesh communities and foreign governments describing the real picture of what has happened in Bangladesh.

Hasan said the foreign ministry has also arranged a visit for the foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka to the destroyed public properties today.

"As these need to be rebuilt, we will not be able to show them later. So, we have arranged the visit tomorrow [today]," he said.

About diplomatic mission staff going on voluntary leave, the minister said he had no idea about how many staff went on leave. "The situation is not like that the diplomatic staff will have to leave Bangladesh."

He said Dhaka has issued a note to New Delhi regarding West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banarjee's remarks on "students' bloodshed" in Bangladesh.

"With due respect, we would like to say that we have good relations with her. But her remarks may create a scope for confusion. We have already issued a note to the Indian government about it," he said.

The minister said many media personnel came under attack during the violence. Two journalists were killed and many injured.

Quader stays away from press

FROM PAGE 12

questioned the organisational strength of the party's Dhaka city units and its associate bodies, said sources.

He expressed disappointment at the failure of the leaders and activists of the party's Dhaka city units and some associate bodies to take to the streets despite the party's directives.

After violence broke out at different parts of the country, Quader

on several occasions urged the party men to take to the streets and put up resistance against the troublemakers.

On July 16, Quader in a meeting with the Dhaka city unit AL leaders instructed them to remain vigilant.

But no leaders and activists of the AL and its associate bodies were seen in many parts of Dhaka city during the demonstrations over quota reforms.

Violence broke out since July 16 that left at least 150 people dead and several hundred injured.

In yesterday's meeting, Quader expressed his frustration that the thana unit committees of the Dhaka city AL have not been formed. He asked the leaders to form those committees immediately.

The AL leader requested the party activists to comply with the curfew rules.

UN, US, UK slam violence

FROM PAGE 12

when they come under attack, which is true for any country in the world. Police were forced to shoot when they were attacked, and public properties were destroyed and set on fire.

Catherine West, parliamentary under-secretary of state of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, on Monday expressed deep concerns over the violence in Bangladesh in recent days.

"The loss of life is unacceptable ... the rights to protest, to peacefully assemble and to express different political views are rights, which the UK holds dear and must be protected," she said, calling for quickly restoring internet.

"We urge an end to the violence and loss of life and call on all sides to find ways to restore calm across Bangladesh, including by establishing a pathway for constructive political dialogue in the interest of the people of Bangladesh."

Meanwhile, the UN has conveyed its concerns to Bangladesh authorities over the "misuse of UN-marked vehicles" during the student protests over the last week.

"The misuse of UN-marked vehicles is alarming and has been conveyed to Bangladeshi authorities," a UN spokesperson told a briefing in New York on Monday.

During the diplomatic briefing by Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud

on Sunday, acting UN resident coordinator Domenico Scalpelli also spoke about UN logos on helicopters seen on TV.

"This has now come to the attention of the UN headquarters in New York," Scalpelli said.

A UN official in Dhaka told this correspondent yesterday that these vehicles are the properties of Bangladesh government, but use of those marked with UN logos during violence is a reputational issue for the UN.

Asked, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen told this correspondent yesterday evening: "We are looking into it."

The UN spokesperson in New York said the "brutal crackdown on the student protesters" in Bangladesh is unacceptable. Accountability and dialogue are essential.

Domenico Scalpelli told Hasan on Sunday that internet outage is impacting the lifesaving work of UN and NGO partners for flood victims and Rohingya crisis response, as well as government's monthly social security cash payments for most vulnerable poor families.

"Reduction of security forces in Cox's Bazar camps risks resulting in further increase of insecurity in those camps."

"We need government's facilitation for us now to bring in satellite phones and other equipment for emergency communications," he said.

Broadband internet back in selected areas

FROM PAGE 12

were given a list of social media and messaging apps at a meeting at the BTRC and instructed to submit a report on the success rate of blocking those apps after running trials, according to sources involved with the process.

They requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of matter.

While, the government and the BTRC said the internet blackout occurred due to the attack on the data centres in the capital's Mohakhali, the sources said the shutdown of the internet was ordered by the government.

The Daily Star visited the data centres in question and found no sign of fire damage to the building that housed them.

Officials of these data centres also confirmed that the fire did not reach their offices.

They said the fire that broke out on Thursday in the building of the Department of Disaster Management in Mohakhali, adjacent to the data

centres, has damaged several overhead cables connected to the data centres.

Even if these data centres were completely gutted by the fire, the internet connections of less than one-fourth of country's users at best should have been disrupted, Mohiuddin Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Mobile Phone Consumers Association told this newspaper.

He went on to say that since there were redundancies and big internet service providers did not host their servers at those centres, the countrywide internet service should have been running largely smoothly.

Terming internet service as a basic need, Mohiuddin urged the government to restore internet for every citizen as soon as possible.

Multiple broadband service providers said many of their cables and equipment were vandalised during the recent violence, but it should have only resulted in suspension of internet connections in those specific areas, not a complete blackout.

On July 17, after the government

ordered the shutdown of mobile internet, Palak, state minister for ICT, said the decision was taken in light of the current unrest in the country and to stop the spread of fake news on social media.

On July 18, a fire broke out in the building of the Department of Disaster Management in Mohakhali, damaging the internet transmission lines of some data centres housed in an adjacent building.

On the same day, around 8:00pm, officials of Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) said fire may eat away 30 to 40 percent of bandwidth supply, leaving some users disconnected and many with slow internet.

But around 9:00pm, Bangladesh went under a complete internet blackout.

Emdadul Haque, president of ISPAB, yesterday said though there are some works still going on to restore their damaged lines, they are now prepared to provide broadband internet across the country.