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UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres met Bangladesh Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the UN Headquarters on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York yesterday.

PHOTO: CHIEF ADVISER'S PRESS WING

FORGING UNITY WITH ISLAMIST PARTIES Jamaat eyes large electoral alliance

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and RASHIDUL HASAN

The vacuum in the wake of the Awami League's departure from the political arena and the BNP's impending reemergence as number one are leading other parties to peel away from these major players and seek to make their own spheres of alliance.

After 15 years of absolute domination by the AL, political parties are now considering alternative scenarios leading up to the next elections.

The uprising that toppled the Hasina-led government on August 5, also appears to have cracked the decades old BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami alliance.

The Jamaat is attempting to rally all Islamist parties under one umbrella.

- ➔ **Jamaat's role in '71 preventing an ideological alliance**
- ➔ **Efforts on for merger of Gono Odhikar Parishad factions**
- ➔ **Smaller unregistered parties trying to lean on EC-approved parties**
- ➔ **Minor Islamist parties seeking to be under one umbrella**

The move came at a time when BNP and Jamaat leaders have differed in private and in public on various issues, including reforms and when the polls should be held. The taunts and barbs leave little room for doubt that the 33-year-old relationship has soured after the fall of the Hasina-led government.

The largest Islamist party of Bangladesh is accused of perpetrating war crimes during Bangladesh's Liberation War and has been relentlessly hounded over the last 15 years.

In fact, its role in providing a strong platform of quislings during the Liberation War is one of the bones of contention among Islamist political outfits. Another point of difference is regarding Jamaat's

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US to back interim govt in holding free, fair polls Yunus, Blinken hold talks



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has indicated that Bangladesh will have US support for a free and fair election, which will chart an inclusive, democratic, and equitable future for the people.

He also underscored US support and assistance for the interim government of Bangladesh as it guides the country towards economic stability and highlighted the importance of reforms to ensure continued foreign direct investment, according to US State

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WB to provide \$3.5b to support reforms

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank would provide \$3.5 billion to Bangladesh to support the interim government's reform initiatives following a request from Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

At least \$2 billion would be fresh loans and another \$1.5 billion would be repurposed from the existing programmes, said a statement from the chief adviser's press wing quoting Ajay Banga, president of the World Bank Group.

Yunus met with Banga on Wednesday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York.

During the meeting, Yunus sought the WB's support for the wide range of reforms the interim government had undertaken and asked the global lender to be creative about its lending programme, the statement said.

"It is a big opportunity to rebuild the country," Yunus said.

The WB would support reforms in digitisation, liquidity, energy and power, and transport, according to the statement.

Banga also discussed the issue of energy sector cooperation in South Asia and how hydro energy produced in Nepal and Bhutan could be shared by neighbours such as India and Bangladesh.

The issue of hydropower cooperation was also discussed during a meeting between Yunus and Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on the sidelines of UNGA.

Yunus stressed the need for increased energy trade between the two nations, saying Nepal is endowed with a huge amount of renewable energy.

Bangladesh is expected to sign a 40-megawatt power purchase agreement

with Nepal next month. Nepalese delegates at the meeting said the country would be able to export more electricity in a few years.

Energy cooperation, trade and people-to-people interactions between the two South Asian nations featured prominently during the talks, according to the statement.

Energy, power and transport Adviser Fouzul Kabir Khan and senior secretary and SDG Affairs Coordinator Lamiya Morshed were also present during the meeting.

At least \$2 billion would be fresh loans and another \$1.5 billion would be repurposed from the existing programmes.

'Don't have any plan to run for office' Yunus tells NYT event

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has taken shelter in India, should be extradited if she has committed crimes, said Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

"Why shouldn't she? If she has committed crimes, she should be extradited and brought to justice," he said responding to a question at the New York Times Climate Forward summit on Wednesday.

Prof Yunus said he did not have a timeframe for when Bangladesh would hold elections.

Several commissions that were formed are expected to provide their reform recommendations in the coming months, after which the country will set a date for polls.

Asked if he has any plans to run for office, Prof Yunus responded in the negative.

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Shakib conquers again in own way

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Kanpur

Shakib Al Hasan came, he saw, and he conquered, in his own way.

Although the second Test between Bangladesh and India in Kanpur is starting today, Shakib, with his quirky charm, which has stood the test of time in a career spanning over 17 years, conquered the minds of the media once again yesterday.

There was no apparent cause for Shakib to come to yesterday's press conference, which he attended to the surprise of the media contingents from both Bangladesh and India.

When the Bangladesh team's media manager revealed at 1:01 PM yesterday that Shakib and not skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto would attend the pre-match press conference, there was anticipation that an announcement may be coming.

Shakib, however, quickly dispelled that notion by talking as he usually does while answering most of the early questions.

When Bangladesh's media contingent's time came to pitch their questions, Shakib dropped the bombshell.

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GOVERNMENT JOBS Stalled recruitment tests vex jobseekers

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Several recruitment tests for different government posts, including the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations, have been postponed since mid-July, causing concerns among the jobseekers already frustrated by a backlog of tests.

Officials have cited the July uprising and subsequent change in government, and floods as reasons behind the postponement of the exams while uncertainty over the tests, along with high application fees, has further put the jobseekers into a tight spot.



"The demands of those who waged the movement are getting the least importance."

Rabiul Alam, a jobseeker

Rabiul Alam, a student of Dhaka University, said he has to move to a mess as the result of his master's examination has been published. It will increase his monthly cost. "My father will retire next year. I can't even focus on my studies amid all the uncertainty," he added.

"Meanwhile, there is no big job circular. Recruitment tests have been deferred one after another," he added.

Rabiul took part in the anti-discrimination student movement, which ultimately toppled the Sheikh Hasina administration, demanding equal opportunities in government job recruitment. Now the stalled exams have instilled a feeling in him that their demands are being ignored even after achieving victory in the movement.

"The demands of those who waged the student movement are getting

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The ground floor of the Dhanmondi Hawkers' Market has been flooded following incessant rain yesterday, thanks to poor drainage. The rain disrupted public life in the capital as many roads and alleys went under water.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUSINESS

Interest payments cross Tk 100,000cr

The government's interest payments against loans surged 24.5 percent in fiscal 2023-24, exceeding the Tk 100,000 crore mark for the first time, thanks to higher borrowing costs for loans from both domestic and foreign sources.

According to the finance ministry's fiscal report, over Tk 114,000 crore was spent on interest payments in FY24, representing more than one-sixth of the national budget.

While spending on subsidies decreased slightly, the government missed the revenue targets set by the IMF for its ongoing \$4.7 billion loan programme.

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