

## Moscow to back Dhaka’s enhanced role in BRICS

UNB, Dhaka

Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey A Ryabkov has pledged to advance the “matured” relations with Bangladesh to a new height.

The Deputy Foreign Minister thanked the government of Bangladesh for its renewed commitment to remain engaged with the BRICS alliance. He assured that the Russian government will support Bangladesh for a greater role in the bloc during its future expansion, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

The issues were discussed when Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin held a bilateral meeting with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey A Ryabkov on the sidelines of the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on Thursday.

During the meeting, both sides discussed areas of mutual interest and cooperation, with a focus on further strengthening the relations between the two countries.

The discussions also featured holding the next Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) in Moscow, Russia.

The foreign secretary highlighted the historical ties between Bangladesh and Russia and underscored the importance of cooperation in the areas of energy and food security between the two countries.

The foreign secretary thanked the deputy foreign minister for inviting Bangladesh to the BRICS summit and shared Bangladesh’s keen interest to contribute to the BRICS alliance.

Appreciating Bangladesh’s standing on multilateral issues, including the strong belief in multilateralism and a multipolar world for a sustained and rules-based

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



Large potholes have developed on the Manda-North Mugda Road in the capital, posing risk to commuters. Vehicles often get stuck in the potholes filled with sewer water. According to locals, the road has been in a shabby state for several years. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

## 100 candidates facing fresh verification

FROM PAGE 1

The order further states that the SB should complete the process at the earliest possible time.

Asked about the matter, Kamrul Hasan Mahmud, special superintendent (verification) of SB, said, “We’re doing the verification as part of a regular process and at the directive of higher authorities. There is no specific reason behind it.”

The preliminary test of the 41st BCS was held in March 2021 and the written tests in November-December that year. The viva-voce concluded in June last year. The PSC recommended 2,520 candidates for jobs in different cadres in August this year.

Of the successful candidates, 323 were recommended for administration, 100 for police, 25 for foreign services, 230 for agriculture, 88 for education, 36 for forest department, 76 for livestock, 38 for information, 60 for taxes and 465 for other cadres. Under BCS health, 108 were recommended to be assistant surgeons and 171 dentists.

The role of the police during the mass uprising that led to the fall of the

government faced intense scrutiny. The force faced public outrage as officers used excessive force to suppress the protests. Many police personnel opened fire on protesters, killing hundreds and maiming many others.

Many members of the force could not escape public wrath: protesters killed 44 policemen, burnt down 224 police facilities, and vandalised 236.

In the 15 years of Awami League rule, many police officers acted as though they were activists of the party to get desired posts and promotions. They used excessive force on opposition and dissenters.

After the fall of the government in early August, many police personnel went on strike, demanding an independent commission to run the force. They also demanded that police should not be controlled by the ruling party.

Regarding the reverification of 62 ASPs, a top officer said the background check would determine if they have any political affiliations with the AL.

“Decisions regarding the officials will be made after the verification. In

the meantime, they will continue their training,” the official said, requesting anonymity.

The 62 ASPs were recruited through the 38th and 40th BCS (held in 2017 and 2023) and were set to begin their probationary postings on October 20. But a day before the parade was scheduled to begin, it was postponed.

The decision of reverification of these ASPs came apparently after Salauddin Ammar, a coordinator of the student movement against discrimination at Rajshahi University, alleged that the officers had affiliations with the AL.

In a recent Facebook post, he said the 62 ASPs were recruited during the AL regime and asked whether they were “investigated”.

The interim government on October 21 discharged 252 trainee sub-inspectors (SIs) of the 40th Outside Cadet batch, who were receiving basic training in Sardah, on allegations of breaching discipline.

They were discharged only 10 days before their graduation.

## Experts welcome decision to raise age limit to 32

FROM PAGE 1

younger candidates in training and the workplace,” Bhuiyan added.

In response to a question, Bhuiyan talked in favour of fostering private sector growth by changing the mindset that everyone must qualify for the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) or other government jobs.

“It is not feasible for the government to create that many job opportunities. Instead, the government should facilitate private sector growth and create conditions that encourage entrepreneurship, thus balancing job opportunities,” he added.

Besides the maximum age, the interim government’s advisory council on Thursday decided to cap the number of BCS exams a candidate is allowed to take at three.

Firoz Mia, a public administration

expert and writer, applauded the decision to limit the number of attempts a candidate can make for BCS as a commendable step.

“If a candidate cannot succeed in three attempts, they should pursue alternative plans.”

He also said the increased age limit should not apply to all job categories.

For roles where the minimum qualification is a Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), the entry age should be capped at 26 to 27 years because a person typically achieves their HSC by the age of 18 or 19 years, Firoz pointed out. These candidates do not face session delays in their academic careers either.

Firoz is also concerned about the possibility of highly qualified candidates applying for lower-grade positions late in their careers.

“We now see many university

graduates feeling disheartened due to low pay after joining a peon’s post, which hampers their focus and productivity,” he said.

Abul Kashem Md Mohiuddin, secretary of the planning ministry’s Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division, believes that increasing the age limit was likely not in the government’s initial plans..

It considered the desires of the youth and thus addressed an “inequality” in the job entry process, he said.

He said limiting the number of BCS exams a candidate can take was an excellent decision.

“During my time as an additional secretary at the public administration ministry, this initiative was discussed multiple times, and seeing its implementation now is satisfying.”

## Salehuddin, Mansur face surprise US judicial order

FROM PAGE 1

US District Judge Carl J Nichols directed the US Marshals Service “to detain and bring to court” Ahmed and Mansur, granting a request from Smith Cogeneration (Bangladesh).

The company has described Ahmed and Mansur as “two of the most senior leaders” of Bangladesh’s finances and says it needs their depositions as part of its decades-long effort to satisfy the arbitration awards.

But Bangladesh – appearing on the docket for the first time since the case was filed in 2006 – filed a speedy appeal to the DC Circuit Thursday afternoon, arguing that Judge Nichols had no jurisdiction to order the arrests of Ahmed and Mansur.

“In addition, the two individuals to whom the bench warrants are directed, both of whom are high-level Bangladeshi diplomats and officers of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, are immune from criminal and civil process in the United States,” Bangladesh wrote in its appeal.

The immediate appeal, Bangladesh said, divests Judge Nichols’ court of jurisdiction and renders the bench warrants unenforceable.

The Daily Star shared the Law360 report with Ahmed and Mansur and sought comments, but neither of them responded. This newspaper also contacted the chief adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam, but he declined to comment.

This newspaper tried to reach Md

Touhid Hossain, foreign affairs adviser, DM Salauddin, chargé d’affaires at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, and Khandaker Masudul Alam, director general (North America) at the foreign ministry over the phone. None of them were available for comments.

When contacted by the newspaper, two top Power Development Board officials said they were unaware of the issue.

Smith Cogeneration, in its Wednesday motion for contempt sanctions, said Ahmed and Mansur were supposed to appear Wednesday for the depositions under a court order directing them to do so. But the pair did not show up, according to the motion.

“Without an order from this court holding the [government of Bangladesh] in contempt, the [government] will continue to ignore the authority of this court and will not comply or respond to the notices of deposition,” Smith Cogeneration said in the motion.

Both Ahmed and Mansur were in Washington this week for the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group.

Smith Cogeneration said the visit might be its only chance to take the depositions as the company chases down Bangladeshi assets.

Smith Cogeneration said it has been fighting for years to enforce the arbitral awards after an International Chamber of Commerce tribunal in London issued them in 2002 and

2003.

The dispute has its origins in 1997, when Smith Cogeneration signed a power purchase agreement with the Bangladesh government and its Power Development Board that provided for the construction of a barge-mounted power plant in northern Bangladesh.

Smith Cogeneration told the DC court in its 2006 enforcement petition that the government agreed to provide the company with all the required permits to complete the project, according to the Law360 report.

However, the government nixed the project in 1999 and never provided the company with the necessary permits, Smith Cogeneration claimed. It then cashed in a \$1.5 million performance bond guarantee that had been funded by Smith Cogeneration.

The company initiated arbitration before the ICC tribunal that same year, and the tribunal later ordered the power board to fork over \$13.5 million. The Power Development Board was also obligated to pay an additional \$39,000, and the PDB and Bangladesh government were obligated to pay an additional \$222,000, according to court filings.

A DC federal judge confirmed the awards in 2007, and the court revised its final judgment at Smith Cogeneration’s request in May. Smith Cogeneration’s counsel told Law360 that, taking into account interest and other costs, Bangladesh now owes Smith Cogeneration more than \$31 million.

## They got capacity charges for 16yrs

FROM PAGE 1

The Awami League government had created a chain of corruption. Those who belonged to the chain were the beneficiaries only. As a result, people wanted an overhaul of the system – an end to all types of corruption. So, our main focus is on what people want and what their expectations are.

DS: What is the situation in the power sector now?

Adviser: A network of corruption was created here too and the anchor of that architecture was the Indemnity Act of 2010 (Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply-Special Provisions).

The decisions made under this act were without proper scrutiny – some were given all the benefits. So, we decided that we would not continue that act. We have formed an independent committee to review all the deals signed under this act.

We have suspended new projects that were taken up under this act and we are scrutinising projects that have started or nearing completion.

We are floating tenders and following the Public Procurement Rules 2008 in taking up new projects or procurements.

DS: What is the fate of the power plants that have been taking capacity charges without producing electricity?

Adviser: We are not extending any agreement with such power plants. We have said that no plant will get a tenure extension. Some came to me saying that if we don’t extend the tenure, it may create problems in particular areas. But we asked them how a deal signed for five years was extended to 16 years. You enjoyed capacity charges for 16 years – not anymore. Due to those quick rental plants, the power tariff has increased.

DS: How do you see the power sector when you leave your position?

Adviser: The main problem in this sector is the lack of energy supply. Our gas production is declining. We are emphasising gas extraction through BAPEX. The plan is to drill 50 wells next year and 100 wells the year after.

Our next strategy will depend on the success of the drilling process. If we get at least 1.2 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, we will take a strategy. If not, we will import liquefied natural gas.

If needed, we will set up two more floating storage regasification units. One will be installed in the south and another in Moheshkhali. But we will go through the tendering process.

We are also trying to figure out how we can import fuel at a cheaper rate. Besides, we are trying to reduce the subsidy burden of the Bangladesh Power Development Board without increasing the power tariff.

Initiatives have been taken to float tenders for 40 renewable energy projects and those will reduce the power tariff.

DS: What is the current debt status of the power and energy sector?

Adviser: When we took charge, several companies wrote to us that if we don’t pay their dues within a certain period, they will stop the supply. India’s Adani Power also stressed their payments.

There were dues of about \$12.15 billion only in the energy sector. That has now dropped to \$700 million. The situation is fairly satisfactory now.

DS: You have curtailed the power

of the ministry in setting fuel prices to make Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission stronger, but prices of some products like diesel, petrol and jet fuels are still being set by the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation. Is there any plan to let BERC deal with such products in future?

Adviser: We need to think more about it. Sometimes, the fuel price shoots up in the global market and sometimes it drops drastically. There is a method for fuel pricing – if the price goes up too much in the global market, the government may want to keep it normal by providing subsidies. But if the responsibility is given to BERC, they will go for manual pricing and the public interest may be compromised. We will discuss it more.

DS: Electricity customers are fed up with the charges of prepaid and postpaid meters. Do you have any plans?

Adviser: I am facing questions on this from even my relatives. All types of consumers are fed up with this meter charge. We told BERC to identify the problem first – let’s see what we find.

DS: People want to know the status of the mega projects and their future.

Adviser: I have been visiting such project sites myself. I get disappointed everywhere as public interest was not considered while taking most of those million-dollar projects. Most of them were taken up considering the vested interests of some groups.

It was never considered how the projects would serve the people and how many people would they serve. For example, the Padma rail link project was taken at a cost of Tk 40,000 crore. I asked the officials what their revenue target was and they said about Tk 1,400 crore a year. When I wanted to know the current revenue, I found that the project fetched Tk 37 crore in the first six months.

Although the revenue will increase when the line connects Jashore from Bhanga, but how much? It may rise to Tk 80 crore or Tk 100 crore, but where will Tk 1,400 crore come from?

Let us have a look at another project in the Matarbari area of Cox’s Bazar. There was supposed to be a port and an export processing zone (EPZ) built in the area and those would require electricity. It’s very logical.

But when I visited the area, I saw that there was no port or EPZ. However, the power plant has already been completed. Why is this? It’s because someone involved with the corruption network wanted a power plant and got it. Where is the public interest here for a Tk 42,000 crore project? It remains on paper only.

DS: How do you define such projects and what will be their fate when they are already completed?

Adviser: All are vendor-driven development in the name of public interest. The vendors wanted work and the government awarded them. There was no collaboration between the projects. For instance, there is a power plant but the transmission line is yet to be completed. If there is a pipeline, the gas supply is absent. We are trying to create a linkage between the completed projects to get the result with lower costs.

DS: Let’s talk about the transport sector.

Adviser: It’s the same, the characters

## Ex-state minister, 2 former secys placed on remand

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Zakir Hossain, former state minister for primary and mass education; Mustafa Kamal Uddin, former senior secretary to the home ministry; and Helal Uddin Ahmed, former senior secretary of the local government division, on remand in connection with three murder cases.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Nazmin Akter passed the orders yesterday, said a court staffer.

Zakir was placed on three-day remand in a case filed over the death of one Shamim Howlader, 38, in Dhaka’s Mohammadpur area on July 20, this year. He was produced before the court with a five-day remand prayer.

On October 18, the victim’s cousin Jakir Hossain filed the murder case with Mohammadpur Police Station, accusing former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 67 others.

On Thursday, Zakir was arrested in the case from Mohammadpur. He is not an FIR named accused.

Meanwhile, Mustafa was put on three-day remand in a case filed over the killing of a Jubo Dal leader,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

## Those guilty of violating rights won’t be picked

FROM PAGE 12

Lu, US assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. He briefed Lu about the overall security situation in Bangladesh and the various activities of the army with government support.

General Waker met with senior military and civilian officials from the US and Canada, the release said.

On October 17, he held bilateral meetings at the UN headquarters with Jean Pierre Lacroix, under-secretary-general for the Department of Peace Operations; Atul Khare, under-secretary-general for the Department of Operational Support; and Ilze Brands Kehris, assistant secretary-general for human rights.

He also met with General Jai Menon, director of the Office for Peacekeeping

Strategic Partnerships.

These meetings highlighted the vital contributions of Bangladeshi peacekeepers, especially those from the armed forces, the ISPR said. The army chief stressed the importance of increasing Bangladeshi participation in UN missions and improving representation at the policymaking and command levels. He discussed the ongoing activities of the army in alignment with the interim government’s directives, focusing on the current national situation.

The army chief underscored the government’s efforts to enhance socio-economic conditions and peace in the CHT. The discussions also covered critical topics such as training exchanges and improving operational capabilities.

On October 22, he met with General Randy A George, chief of staff of the US

Army, at the Pentagon. Their dialogue centred on mutual interests, including UN peacekeeping missions, training support, bilateral relations, regional security cooperation, and post-disaster humanitarian assistance. This meeting also included the US army chief’s foreign policy adviser.

General Waker met Dr Ely Ratner, assistant secretary of defence for Indo-Pacific security, where they explored strengthening ties between countries in the region and the Bangladesh Army. Officials from National Security Council, including Lindsey W Ford, special assistant to US president, were present.

In Canada, the army chief discussed visa facilitation for Bangladeshi students and military personnel in a meeting with Lt Gen Stephen Kelsey, vice chief of the Canadian Defence Staff.