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'AL won't be allowed to hold protests' CA's press secy says it must apologise first, its leadership tried

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam has said the Awami League will not be allowed to demonstrate until it apologises and its leadership faces trial for the killings during the July uprising.

He made the comments yesterday, a day after the AL announced on Facebook that it would begin from February 1 a nine-day programme that includes hartals and blockades in protest at what it said were rising prices of essentials, deteriorating law and order, and killings of leaders and activists.

"Does any leader or worker of the Awami League regret committing genocide? Had they begged pardon? You saw 71 children get killed and shots fired at them from helicopters. Has anyone

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People head to work in a foggy morning on a three-wheeler on Khulna City Bypass. The vehicle they are travelling on is illegal and in no way supposed to be on the highway. It also lacks any lights that could help other fast-moving vehicles see it in the foggy weather. The photo was taken at Aranghata yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## BGB-BSF CONFERENCE Bangladesh's tone will be different

Says home adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Bangladesh will adopt a stronger stance in the upcoming 55th director general level conference between Border Guard Bangladesh and India's Border Security Force, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said yesterday.

The four-day conference will take place in New Delhi from February 17.

At a press briefing following an inter-ministerial preparatory meeting at the Secretariat, Jahangir said, "Our tone [during the talks] will be different."

He emphasised that the killing of unarmed Bangladeshi civilians by BSF personnel and Indian miscreants at the border must end.

"This is unacceptable under any circumstances. We'll strongly press India to take effective measures to stop border killings."

He also highlighted concerns over the abduction of Bangladeshi farmers near the border and called for immediate action to prevent such incidents.

Regarding cross-border smuggling, Jahangir pointed to the large influx of illegal drugs, particularly Phensedyl, from India under the guise of medication.

"This issue will be addressed seriously, and we'll

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## 30 killed in India's Kumbh festival stampede Say state authorities; 60 hurt; opposition blames tragedy on 'mismanagement'

REUTERS, Prayagraj

Dozens of people were killed in a pre-dawn stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela in northern India yesterday, police sources and a Reuters witness said, as tens of millions gathered to take a dip in sacred river waters on the most auspicious day of a six-week Hindu festival.

State authorities said at least 30 people were killed and 60 were injured in the pre-dawn stampede. Three police sources and a Reuters witness put the toll at nearly 40.

Reuters counted 39 bodies inside the morgue of the local hospital. One of the three police sources and a fourth officer said all 39 were stampede victims. All three police sources said nearly 40 bodies had been brought to the morgue.

Bodies were still being brought to the Moti Lal Nehru Medical College hospital morgue more than 12 hours after the tragedy at the world's biggest gathering of humanity.

"More bodies are coming in. We have nearly 40 bodies here. We are transferring them out as well and handing over to families one by one," one of the sources said.

Senior police officer Vaibhav Krishna told reporters that 90 people were taken to the hospital after the stampede, of whom 30 died and the rest were being treated.

Opposition parties blamed the stampede on what they called the government's "mismanagement" and "VIP culture".

## Arakan Army disrupts trade with Myanmar

Trade through Teknaf Port may come to a halt as rebel forces seize cargo ships

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Cross-border trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar through Teknaf Land Port is in disarray as the Arakan Army, a Myanmar-based rebel group, disrupts ship movement along the Naf river estuary.

With cargo being seized, intensified border tensions, and dwindling imports and exports, traders warn that the once-thriving trade route may soon be completely halted.

On January 16, the Arakan Army seized three cargo ships travelling from Yangon to Teknaf. While two ships were released on January 20, one remains in their custody.

"We don't know the exact reason for the seizure," said Ehteshamul Haque Bahadur, general secretary of the Teknaf Land Port C&F Agents Association.

The rebel group that controls much of the 270km border with Bangladesh has imposed an unwritten embargo on

ship movement along the Naf estuary. Bahadur expressed concern over the disruption of trade. "If this situation persists, traders may be forced to abandon their businesses in Teknaf. Resolving this requires collective efforts."

Importer Shawkat Ali, whose goods are on the seized ship, said yesterday that the Arakan Army is inspecting vessels on the Myanmar's territorial waters that are under their control.

Some goods from Myanmar are being imported through Chattogram Port. Shawkat, however, said using the Chattogram Port significantly increases costs and causes delays. "Shipping goods via Teknaf takes five to seven days, while via Chattogram requires at least a month."

A businessman, wishing not to be named, claimed that the Arakan Army is holding one ship hostage as it belongs

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**"Shipping goods via Teknaf takes five to seven days, while via Chattogram requires at least a month."**  
SHAWKAT ALI  
an importer

Evaly's Rassel, wife jailed for two years over embezzlement



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced Evaly's founding chief executive officer Mohammad Rassel, and his wife Shamima Nasrin, former chairperson of the e-commerce platform, to two years' imprisonment in a case filed over the embezzlement of Tk 14.10 lakh from a customer.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Partha Bhadra pronounced the verdict in their absence in the courtroom.

He also fined them Tk 2,000, in default of which they will have to serve two more months in jail.

The punishment will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, said the magistrate in his judgment.

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## Peace talks with Ukraine possible

Says Putin, rules out speaking directly with Zelensky

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that his country could hold peace talks with Ukraine, but ruled out speaking directly with President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom he called "illegitimate".

The Ukrainian leader responded by saying that Putin was "afraid" of negotiations and was using "cynical tricks" to prolong the nearly three-year conflict.



US President Donald Trump has put pressure on both sides to end the fighting since assuming office on January 20, threatening tougher sanctions on Russia while claiming that Zelensky is ready to negotiate a "deal".

"If (Zelensky) wants to participate in the negotiations, I will allocate people to take part," Putin said, calling the Ukrainian leader "illegitimate" because his presidential term expired during martial law.

"If there is a desire to negotiate and find a compromise, let anyone lead the negotiations there... Naturally, we will strive for what suits us, what corresponds to our interests," he added.

Zelensky said that there was a chance to achieve "real peace" but that the Kremlin chief was frustrating efforts to stop the fighting.

"Today, Putin once again confirmed that he is afraid of negotiations, afraid of strong leaders, and does everything possible to prolong the war," Zelensky wrote on X.



Devotees around the bodies of the victims lying on the ground after a stampede during the Maha Kumbh Mela festival in Prayagraj, India, yesterday.

Binimoy 'linked to Joy's shell company'  
Ahsan Mansur tells Prothom Alo roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Binimoy, a platform to transfer money from one bank or mobile financial service to another, was linked to a shell company opened by Sajeeb Wazed Joy, Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur said yesterday.

Sheikh Hasina's son Joy created the shell company to introduce Binimoy, which is no longer functioning, after the previous government handed the work over to the ICT ministry, Mansur said.

He was speaking at a roundtable titled "Challenges and Prospects of Digital Transactions: VAT Hike Perspective", organised by the Prothom Alo at its office in Dhaka yesterday.

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