

BRICS summit planned for July in Rio: Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Leaders of the countries known as BRICS will hold a summit in Rio de Janeiro in July, the current chair Brazil announced yesterday.

Other members of the trading bloc include Russia, India, China South Africa and others.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira said on the social media platform X that the summit will be held July 6-7 and feature leaders of 20 countries with full or associate status in the bloc.

At this meeting "we will make very important decisions for the development of all these countries, for cooperation and for improving the living conditions of all their inhabitants," Vieira said.

US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose 100 percent tariffs on the BRICS countries if they undercut the US dollar.

At a BRICS summit in October in Russia, the member countries discussed boosting non-dollar transactions and strengthening local currencies.

The government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said that under the Brazilian presidency the BRICS bloc will focus on strengthening cooperation with developing nations of the so-called Global South and on reforming multilateral institutions.



Taking advantage of the government holiday, a large number of people, along with their friends and family, throng the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Lalon Utsab rescheduled to February 23

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The Lalon Memorial Festival in Tangail's Madhupur has been rescheduled and is now set to take place on February 23.

Earlier, the occasion to observe the 134th death anniversary of Fakir Lalon Shah was scheduled to be held on February 12 but the programme had to be called off in the face of objections by local Hefazat-e-Islam and Qaumi Ulama Parishad.

Sabuj Mia, the convener of the festival organising committee, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star yesterday.

Sabuj said, "The Lalon festival has been rescheduled. The new date has been mutually fixed at a meeting held on Friday night at the office of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer. There, Hefazat has promised that they will not create any obstacles in organising the event. Our organisation has also assured that no controversial speech will be given and controversial music will not be performed.

"It has been decided to hold the event at Madhupur Auditorium instead of Madhupur Bus Stand to avoid public inconvenience."

Contacted, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Zubair Hossain said, "The programme was initially postponed due to some misunderstanding. It will now be held at a changed date and venue."

A charter of reforms for next govt

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As the government has overwhelming international support, "other forces cannot take advantage".

The international community doesn't buy "their narratives".

"They even attempted to sell the story to Donald Trump, but it was futile."

The propaganda about Bangladesh has fallen flat, as the UN report clearly states who did what, he observed.

NATIONAL CHARTER

Prof Ali Riaz, co-chair of the consensus commission, said discussions between political parties and the commission will lead to the creation of a national charter.

The party that gains power will then implement both short-term and long-term reforms based on this charter.

This charter will act as guidelines on how the country will be governed. "It will also contain a roadmap to a new Bangladesh."

The commission will hold dialogues with all political parties individually and in groups, said Riaz, adding that there would be "unofficial discussions with the

parties too".

Talking to reporters, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "We hope a minimum consensus on reform will be reached soon. Based on that, the national election will be held without any delay. This is our expectation.

"We made it clear that local government elections must be held after the national election."

Jamaat-e-Islami Naye-e-Ameer Abdullah Muhammad Taher said, "It is our position that once the reform commission makes its final decision, the election should be held. The chief adviser said the election will be held in December. We are observing how it goes."

Leaders of several political parties said holding local government polls before the national election would result in bloodshed.

Hasnat Abdullah, convener of Students Against Discrimination, said, "All political parties have reached the consensus that the Awami League will be irrelevant in Bangladesh.

"We have urged the interim government to take legal steps to ban the Awami League... As a first step, we demand the cancellation of their registration."

Several Islamist party leaders said they would reject reform proposals that contradict the Quran and Sunnah. They also criticised the proposal to include pluralism as a fundamental principle of the constitution.

They also demanded a ban on the AL. Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna said, "Some participants in the meeting have demanded that Islam remain the state religion. They also insisted that the constitutional provisions related to Islam should not be altered and expressed dissatisfaction with some of the proposals."

However, he said, in a democracy, pluralism means embracing a diversity of opinions.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee Convener Nasir Uddin Patwary said the processes of constituent assembly, national election, and reforms should go on

simultaneously.

"We have begun the struggle for a new constitution and constituent assembly elections to put the last nail in the coffin of fascism. The government has started the struggle for reforms; we have started the struggle for creating a new constitution," he said.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Gono Samhati Andolon, said the national election should be the priority. "Reforms are necessary for elections, and elections are also necessary to make the reforms complete ... The upcoming election should be considered a crucial chapter in completing the reforms."

Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andalee Rahman Partha said his party didn't want local government elections before the national election.

"No reforms should delay the national election," he added.

Mojibur Rahman Monju, member secretary of Amar Bangladesh Party, said if the next national election is held before making the reforms, then the election may end up being called into question

Abu Sayed's autopsy report

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may face arrest and trial.

Sayed's defiance and martyrdom inflamed students across the country and galvanised the protests, as people began to join in ever larger numbers. His sacrifice was one of the turning points in the anti-discrimination student movement that culminated into a people's uprising and went on to topple Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime on August 5. His supreme sacrifice became a symbol as well as the spirit of the movement that rallied protesters and inspired them to challenge the regime.

The police had tried to manipulate the case even before it reached the pathologist's table at the Rangpur Medical College. According to the first information report (FIR) at the Tajhat Police Station, Sayed was not a victim of police firing. The police report accused 2,000-3,000 unidentified individuals, including BNP and Jamaat-Shibir protesters, of the murder. The police claimed that these protesters had fired weapons and showered brickbats, killing "an individual". The FIR stated that the police only found out later that it was one Abu Sayed, an undergrad at Begum Rokeya University. Sayed's classmates took him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead, the report added. In an attempt to further deflect the investigation, the police even went so far as to accuse a 16-year-old 11th grader in the case, who had himself been injured during the protests.

Abu Maruf Hossain, then a deputy commissioner of Rangpur Metropolitan Police, was the first to request Rajibul to review his autopsy report. The police officer had marked the report with a cross and asked the doctor to burn it and write another one. Rajibul complied. But Maruf was not happy. He crossed it out and asked for another review. This time, he ordered the doctor to tear up the report and write another one, according to the doctor's statement given to the ICT investigators.

Rajibul did not respond to a phone call for comment, but he had earlier told The Daily Star that he was under immense pressure to falsify the

autopsy report. He claimed he was coerced into modifying the report six times.

Maruf did not receive a call either.

"They ordered me to conclude that Sayed died from a head injury," said the doctor. Sayed had sustained the head injury earlier in the day during a clash with Chhatra League men.

This newspaper has obtained two copies of Sayed's autopsy report, both signed by Rajibul. One version explicitly states, "The cause of death was due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of firearm injuries (shotgun), which were antemortem and homicidal in nature."

Another version, which was ultimately submitted on July 30, mentioned external head injuries, marks of wounds, and blood clots in different parts of Sayed's body. "The cause of death was due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of above-mentioned injuries which is antemortem and homicidal in nature."

Investigators found a copy of the original report discarded in an abandoned location, with a cross mark on it.

A 12-member investigation team led by two ICT prosecutors recently interrogated Rajibul, who disclosed the names of those involved in the cover-up attempt. The investigators gathered digital evidence, tracking the movements of those who entered the office where the post-mortem report was tampered with.

On January 13, Sayed's elder brother Ramzan Ali lodged a complaint with the ICT's prosecution wing against Hasina and 23 others, accusing them of orchestrating Sayed's murder.

Ramzan had earlier filed a murder case with Tajhat Police Station in Rangpur on August 18 against 17 named individuals. They included Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, former inspector general of police; Abdul Baten, former deputy inspector general of police at Rangpur Range; and Md Moniruzzaman, former commissioner of Rangpur Metropolitan Police. Some 130-135 unidentified others were also made accused.

DCs may push for greater control over police

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Such an evaluation would enhance the transparency, accountability, and public welfare orientation of the police force, he added.

According to sources from the Cabinet Division, it is not yet confirmed whether these proposals will be raised in the relevant session of the upcoming conference. However, several officials involved in the meeting indicated that even if these proposals are not included in the written agenda, DCs may still raise them verbally during open discussions with the chief adviser.

Among the 1,200-odd proposals submitted by DCs, 354 will be discussed in the three-day conference, which will cost about Tk 1.73 crore. The conference will be inaugurated by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus at the Shapla Hall of the Chief Adviser's Office and the remaining sessions will take place at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

In the elections held under the Awami League government, the DCs were often blamed for irregularities, a former DC said.

"But in reality, it was the police who stuffed the ballot boxes following instructions from the ruling party – the DCs had little role in that process. If SPs and OCs are placed under the authority of DCs and UNOs, then holding DCs accountable for election-related misconduct would be justified," he added.

The Daily Star also spoke with at least four current and former DCs, all of whom agreed that SPs and OCs should be under the control of DCs and UNOs.

They believe the change would improve law and order at the district and upazila levels while reducing corruption.

Most of the killings during the July uprising occurred in metropolitan areas, said a former DC currently serving as a joint secretary.

"This is because, in these areas, the police do not require a magistrature approval to open fire – the police commissioner can authorise it himself. Since the current government emerged from the July uprising, they may consider this issue with significant attention," he added.

Another official said, as per standard protocol, those who wield

weapons should not be responsible for administrative decisions.

When conducting mobile courts in emergencies, the OCs often fail to provide police forces on time. As a result, the purpose of the mobile court operations is not effectively fulfilled, said another official currently serving as an assistant commissioner (AC) land.

Asked whether DCs should regain this power after more than four decades, AKM Abdul Awal Majumder, a former DC and secretary, said the government can review the overall situation and make a decision on this matter.

Meanwhile, Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Roshid yesterday held a press conference at the Secretariat providing details about the upcoming conference. This year's conference will include 30 working sessions with various ministries and departments, along with four special sessions.

The special sessions will feature open discussions with Yunus, a meeting with the chief justice and the Election Commission, and a conference of the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association.

New student body may also be launched

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However, to generate momentum and attract more public interest, the two platforms are discussing whether the advisers should join the political party after the announcement of an electoral roadmap.

Several leaders of Students Against Discrimination will join the new political party and its Convener Hasnat may even run in the national elections from his hometown of Cumilla, said the sources.

Its Chief Organiser Abdul Hannan Masud and Coordinator Mahin Sarkar are likely to join the party and Hannan might contest the polls from Hatia. The platform's spokesperson Umama Fatema may also join the party and even vie for a seat in parliament.

Talking to this newspaper, Akhter Hossen said, "We will lead the party with a centrist ideology – neither right-wing nor left-wing. Our ideological framework will be set from a middle ground."

CONVENING COMMITTEE

The initial convening committee of the party will comprise 60 to 72 members, while a fully-fledged leadership structure will be made through a council later. A roadmap outlining the process of forming the party has already been developed, they said.

Injured protesters from the 2024 movement will be included in the party in order to fulfil the aspirations of the families of the

victims of the Awami League's brutal response to the uprising, they added.

A 17-member special committee has already been formed to draft the party's charter by incorporating principles inspired by the movements of 1947, 1971, and 2024.

Constitutional experts, political

analysts, and diplomats also gave their opinions on the charter so that the global democratic norms are aligned.

In the charter, the aspirations of young people will be prioritised, alongside a commitment to economy, healthcare, education, gender equality, and religious tolerance.

Sources in the Jatiya Nagorik Committee said although the party's name has not been finalised yet, an extensive organisational groundwork is being done through the committees of these two platforms.

They are also examining the structure, operation and political practice of some youth-based parties in South Asia, including the Aam Aadmi Party and Lok Janshakti Party of India, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the National People's Power of Sri Lanka.

The Jatiya Nagorik Committee formed committees in over 100 thanas and 235 upazilas, comprising students, young professionals, former bureaucrats, journalists, lawyers, business leaders, political figures, and civil society members.

Students Against Discrimination also established 50 committees at various levels, including districts and upazilas.

The two platforms on February 6 launched a nationwide campaign to know from people what they want from the party.

Under the slogan "Your Vision for a New Bangladesh", five key questions are being posed to the public: "Which three actions do you think would change the country?", "What personal issues do you expect the new party to address?", "What do you expect from the new party?",

"What should the party be named?", and "What should be the party's symbol?"

The platforms have so far collected opinions of two lakh people. They aim to gather opinions from more than half a million people by the end of the campaign.

The names proposed by the respondents of the campaign include the People's Revolution Party, People's Power Party, United Revolution Party, United People's Party, Equality and Development Party, Revolutionary People's Party, Democratic People's Party, July Spirit Party, and Civic Democratic Party.

Clarifying their stance, Akhter Hossen said, "Individuals involved in the Awami League, especially those engaged in murder, extortion, and the July massacre, will not be allowed to join the new party."

He, however, said that people from other political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and leftist groups, are welcome to join.

NEW STUDENT BODY

The student organisation, which is likely to be announced alongside the party, will start its journey with a central convening committee. Another convening committee for Dhaka University is also expected to be announced.

The central committee is likely to comprise 171 or 201 members, while the Dhaka University unit will be slightly smaller.

Two key coordinators of Students Against Discrimination are likely to assume leadership roles in the student organisation. They are Abu Baker Majumdar, a fourth-year student of Geology Department at

Dhaka University, and Abdul Kader, a postgraduate student at the Institute of Social Welfare and Research at DU.

Other coordinators of the platform, Rashidul Islam Rifat, Hasib Al Islam, and Jahid Ahsan, may also join the new student body.

After the formation of the central and DU panels, committees will be formed in colleges, universities, and districts across the country.

The student leaders said while the new student body will align ideologically with the new political party, it will remain independent and autonomous.

There are plans to set a maximum age limit of 27-28 years for members, along with a rule that they would not be able to be in the student body after seven years since enrolment into undergraduate programmes.

"The new student organisation will uphold the aspirations of the July uprising and work inclusively with students of all backgrounds," Abdul Kader told this newspaper.

AN APOLOGY

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national interest and, on every occasion, stoutly defended our sovereignty, national integrity and just demands in all bilateral, regional and international fora.

Once again, we apologise for our lapse and appreciate and accept the criticism directed at us. We pledge to maintain the highest standards of ethical and objective journalism.

Thank you.

The Daily Star