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## REPORTS OF SECY'S DEPARTURE Unease grips foreign ministry

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A sense of uncertainty prevails in the foreign ministry over reports that Secretary Jashim Uddin will be removed. On top of this, Sufiur Rahman, who was appointed nearly a month ago as the chief adviser's special assistant, has not joined.

Foreign ministry officials say there is a social media campaign portraying certain officials as beneficiaries of the ousted Awami League regime. Some officials also feel deprived and are lobbying to get better positions.

Journalists yesterday gathered at the foreign ministry for Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain to clear the air, but he did not speak.

"You have to wait for some days," he told reporters before moving towards his vehicle shortly after 5:00pm yesterday.

According to a high official of the foreign ministry, it has been decided that Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin will be removed from the post. There are several options: either he will be put on special duty (OSD), posted as an ambassador, or made rector of the Foreign Service Academy.

He did not explain why Jashim Uddin will be removed from the post.

"You can ask the foreign adviser," he told this correspondent.

This correspondent spoke to a number of officials who said they were in an uneasy situation over the reported

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## Nusraat Faria shown arrested in attempted murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Popular actor Nusraat Faria was shown arrested in an attempted murder case filed with Bhatara Police Station.

Officer in charge of the police station Mazharul Islam last night said the actor is now at the Detective Branch of police (DB) for her "safety".

Earlier, Nusraat Faria was detained at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport before boarding a flight yesterday morning. She was later taken to the DB office for questioning.

Sujan Haque, inspector (investigation) of Bhatara Police Station, said Immigration Police initially detained her at the airport. A team from Bhatara Police Station subsequently took her into custody.

A DB official confirmed that Faria was taken to the DB office on Minto Road for interrogation.

"We are interrogating her. The next steps will be taken based on the interrogation's outcome," the official said.

Faria is among 17 actors sued on April 29 in an attempted murder case filed with Bhatara Police Station in connection with the July uprising.

Inspector Sujan said she would be shown arrested in the case.

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## Israeli strikes kill 130 Palestinians in Gaza

IDF begins 'extensive' ground ops; no progress reported in indirect ceasefire talks

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli strikes killed at least 130 Palestinians across Gaza overnight, health officials said yesterday, as Israel said talks with Hamas included a proposal to end the war but sources on both sides said there had been no progress in the talks.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which has expanded its strikes on the enclave, killing hundreds of people since Thursday.

The IDF said it launched "extensive ground operations" across the Gaza Strip yesterday.

"We have at least 100 martyrs since overnight. Complete families were wiped off the civil registration record by Israeli bombardment," Khalil Al-Deqan, Gaza health ministry spokesperson, told Reuters by phone.

Israel has blocked the entry of medical, food and fuel supplies into Gaza since the start of March to try to pressure Hamas into freeing Israeli hostages and has approved plans that could involve seizing the entire Gaza strip and controlling aid.

The Gaza healthcare system is barely operational because of repeated Israeli

bombardment and raids on hospitals. The blockade on aid supplies has compounded their difficulties while adding to widespread hunger, for which Israel blames Hamas.

Hamas says it will only free the hostages in return for an Israeli ceasefire.

Egypt and Qatar mediators, backed by the United States, began a new round of indirect ceasefire talks between the two sides on Saturday, but sources close to the negotiations told Reuters there had been no breakthrough.

A Palestinian official close to the talks, which are taking place in the Qatari capital, Doha, said: "Hamas is flexible about the number of hostages it can free, but the problem has always been over Israel's commitment to end the war."

Britain's Sky News Arabica and the BBC both reported that the Palestinian group had proposed releasing about half its Israeli hostages in exchange for a two-month ceasefire and the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Contacted by Reuters, a Hamas official said: "Israel's position is unchanged, they want their prisoners released, without a commitment to end the war."

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- Rubio calls Netanyahu over Gaza

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Khalilur rejects BNP's claim of his foreign citizenship



UNB, Dhaka

National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman yesterday said he remains prepared to exercise his rights as a Bangladeshi citizen to the fullest extent.

He made the comment when the UNB drew his attention to the claim, recently made by BNP leader Salauddin Ahmed, that the adviser is a foreign citizen.

Khalilur also said the burden of proving the claim rests on the individual who made it and, if necessary, it would have to be proven before a court of law.

BNP Standing Committee member Salauddin made the claim during a rally in Khulna on Saturday.

"Has the government lost all sense?" he asked. "How can the Bangladesh Army submit security-related reports to a foreign citizen?"

## Environment not conducive to polls yet

Says Jamaat nayeb-e-ameer after talks with consensus commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The current political atmosphere is not yet suitable for a free and fair national election, Syed Abdullah Md Taher, nayeb-e-ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, said yesterday.

"I believe the upcoming election is unlikely to be completely fair and impartial under present circumstances. We're already witnessing incidents of poll-related violence in various constituencies. Recently, Jamaat's office in Pabna's Atghoria was torched."

Taher made the remarks at the second round of talks with the National Consensus Commission held at the LD Hall of the National Parliament to build consensus around key reform proposals.

Calling for institutional changes to ensure credible polls, the Jamaat leader said, "We must establish a system that guarantees fair and accurate elections. Whatever it takes to achieve must be done."

Raising concerns over Election Commission's ability to play an effective role, he said, "The concept of a level playing field is not something to address only on election day – it needs to be created well in advance. The government should act now, especially in areas where there are risks of violence or political clashes."

Stressing the importance of fair polls, Taher said, "The political turmoil caused by the last three elections played a major role in destabilising the country. To overcome this, a credible election is essential."

Taher also expressed concern over the absence of a clear election timeline, which he said was contributing to

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## Iran, Azerbaijan hold joint military drill

AFP, Tehran

Iran and Azerbaijan have launched a joint special forces exercise, state media in the Islamic republic said yesterday, weeks after Iran's president visited the neighbouring country.

The "Aras 2025" exercise, running through May 21, involves Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Azerbaijani troops, the IRNA news agency reported.

The drill was being held in areas of Karabakh previously disputed with Armenia before Azerbaijan regained control in September 2023.

"This drill is a key step in boosting border security and confronting potential threats," said Brigadier General Vali Madani of the Guards' ground forces.

Last month, Iranian President Masoud Pesheshtian made a rare visit to Baku, where he met his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev.



Covered with fly ash, a worker carries a sack of the raw material for cement on his head without any protective gear, risking lung diseases. He earns Tk 600-800 a day by unloading fly ash from vessels and loading on to trucks at Khulna port. Photo was taken yesterday at Jetty-5.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-three Bangladeshi workers have sued a recruitment firm and relevant government officials and departments in Malaysia, seeking RM1.72 million, or Tk 4.8 crore, in compensation over allegations of employment fraud.

The case was filed with the High Court in the Malaysian city of Shah Alam on March 12. Tenaganita, a local rights organisation, made the matter public on Saturday.

Recruitment company Meranti Binamas Sdn Bhd, the secretary-general of the human resources ministry, the director-general of the immigration department and the government department that oversees and regulates public servants have been named in the suit as defendants.

Besides the compensation, the workers also seek a declaration stating that they were victims of human trafficking and job scams and that the authorities were negligent and a court order to prevent their detention by the immigration department pending the disposal of the suit.

According to the statement of claim, Meranti Binamas brought the workers to Malaysia after promising them jobs as construction workers. The Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia confirmed the authenticity of the job offers.

They were promised a minimum monthly salary of RM1,500, or Tk 60,000, with overtime opportunities. But they were asked to pay RM25,000, or over Tk 7 lakh each

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