

Russia bans Amnesty Int'l Accuses it of backing Kyiv against Moscow

REUTERS

Russia's prosecutor general said yesterday it had banned human rights group Amnesty International Limited as an "undesirable organisation", accusing it of backing Ukraine against Russia.

Founded in 1961 and headquartered in London, Amnesty International campaigns for human rights across the world, including on behalf of those it designates prisoners of conscience.

In its statement, Russia's prosecutor general said that Amnesty International Limited's London office was a "centre for the preparation of global Russophobic projects", and accused it of advocating on behalf of Ukraine, with which Russia is at war.

It accused Amnesty of: "doing everything possible to intensify the military confrontation in the region. They justify the crimes of Ukrainian neo-Nazis, call for an increase in their funding, and insist on the political and economic isolation of our country."



Demanding a ban on battery-run autorickshaws, pedal rickshaw pullers demonstrate outside the Ashwini Kumar Hall in Barisal city yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Economists rue lack of economic reforms

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"Bangladesh Economy 2025-26: Policy Reform and National Budget" organised by the Citizens' Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, at the Lakeshore Hotel in Dhaka.

An anti-reform sentiment is noticed among the political elites, business community and the bureaucrats, although reforms were the aspirations of the interim government, said Raihan, also a professor at the University of Dhaka's economics department.

Despite some signs of economic stabilisation, such as a slight easing of inflation and stability in the foreign exchange market, Bangladesh's broader economic reform trajectory remains hampered by structural weaknesses and governance shortcomings, said Debapriya Bhattacharya, the convenor of Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

The government has paid little attention to economic reforms compared to other types of reform.

"Our general grievance is that the government pays far more attention to other reforms than it does to economic reforms. This is a major problem, but they fail to realise its gravity."

If there is no comfort in the economy, no other reform will be able to sustain itself, said Bhattacharya,

also a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

"We are not seeing the kind of structural transformation or reduction in anti-equity bias that would signal a meaningful shift in economic management.

"... Those involved in the system of looting included politicians, who have now fled, business groups, who have become subdued, but the bureaucrats have now become reinvigorated," he added.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the quality of assets of the troubled banks should be reviewed before the end of this government's term to create a model in the banking sector.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, said the government should allocate an amount in the budget to facilitate the recovery of the stolen assets.

"Because the government will have to lodge cases in different countries to recover the stolen assets."

The government can recover the stolen assets through three ways: recovering the money directly, selling the assets of the money launderers and stopping hundi, he said.

AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said that spending in the services sector needs

to be increased.

For instance, more hospitals were built, but nurses were not appointed adequately, he said, while recommending a freeze on tax rate hike this year to coax the business committee to invest.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, a standing committee member of BNP, said the interim government has been following "the fascist government model" to prepare the budget.

"They are doing everything in a stop-gap measure," he said, adding that the job of the interim government is to enable democratic transition.

He criticised the need for the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 as foreign investors are unwilling to invest in an uncertain political climate.

"They were asking when the next general election would take place," said Chowdhury, who led the BNP delegation at the summit held on April 7-10.

He also questioned the interim government's flirting with the idea of allowing foreign companies to operate the Chattogram port and giving a humanitarian corridor to the Rohingya.

"These decisions should come from the political government through consultation, considering the sensitivity of those issues."

though slowly," he said. "We hope it will come down to 6.5 percent next year."

The budget will be televised on June 2. A public feedback period will follow, allowing possible revisions before it is finalised and enacted through an ordinance. Some budgetary measures will take effect immediately.

To support its fiscal programme, the government expects to secure approximately \$3.5 billion in budget support from global lenders by June or July. That includes \$1.3 billion from the International Monetary Fund. The total excludes project loans, Ahmed clarified.

In the infrastructure pipeline, the Rooppur nuclear power project is nearing completion. "Rooppur is more than 80 percent complete, and uranium is already in storage," Ahmed said, adding that trial generation is expected to begin by September or October, with one unit slated to become fully operational by year-end. The second unit has reached roughly 60 percent completion.

Ahmed also stressed that the interim government intends to leave behind lasting institutional reforms for the next administration. "One footprint is the NBR - we've split it. That won't be reversed."

He pointed to several key structural reforms introduced through new ordinances. One outlines how troubled banks can be restructured or liquidated to safeguard depositors. "The ordinance aims to ensure that people's savings and deposits are protected, and that there's a clear process for returning them," said Ahmed.

Another ordinance aims to improve transparency in the public accounts of authorities. A separate regulation ensures that official statistics are published without political interference. "There will be a committee; they will work independently; nobody will interfere with the figures they provide," Ahmed said.

Spring heat breaks records in Central Asia

AFP, Bishkek

Central Asia has been in the grip of a heatwave this spring, with all five countries reporting abnormally high - and in some cases record-breaking - temperatures over the past three months.

The five ex-Soviet states that make up the region are particularly vulnerable to global warming.

Many work in the agricultural sector, which is already grappling with water shortages, while drought conditions have threatened harvests and hydropower generation.

Yunus to visit UK

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diplomatic source in Dhaka.

BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman is now living in London, while deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's sister's family is based in the UK, he said.

Tulip, along with her aunt Sheikh Hasina, mother Sheikh Rehana, brother Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby, and sister Azmina Siddiq, has been named in three separate cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission in January.

Al Jazeera reported that Bangladesh's former Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury spent more than \$500 million on luxury real estate in London, Dubai and New York but did not declare his overseas assets on his Bangladesh tax returns.

Repatriating laundered money has been an important issue for the interim government as huge amounts have been laundered to different countries over the years, a diplomatic source said.

The UK is an important country when it comes to the Rohingya crisis. Now that the funding for the Rohingya is declining, especially after the USAID funding cut worldwide, Dhaka will try to convince the UK for new funding, both as development aid and investment, sources said.

There are over 600,000 Bangladeshi-origin UK citizens there, making it a strong bond between the two countries. Yunus will be seeking to build a bridge between Bangladesh and the diaspora community through trade, investment and the use of expertise back in Bangladesh, sources said.

Act against advisers

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election by December, saying, "This will uphold your dignity, reassure the public, restore stability, and revive the economy."

He criticised the current situation and questioned the need for an Election Commission if, as one adviser claimed, "a mass uprising" elected them as the government.

"If that's the case, why maintain an electoral system at all?" he asked.

In another event in Dhaka, BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan said the party would never reach a compromise with the Awami League.

"We will not do it, and if anyone else tries, we will resist them too," he said during a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club.

Meanwhile, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman said the party plans to develop ward-wise playgrounds in Dhaka if it comes to power in the next election, reports UNB.

"The playground will be developed on three to four bighas of land at least between two wards where children can play, elderly people can walk, and people can breathe fresh air," he said.

Tarique shared the plans while addressing the prize-giving ceremony of the Arafat Rahman Koko Memorial Trust Cricket Tournament at a hotel in London on Sunday.

Frozen fortunes to fund victim compensation

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Sheikh Hasina's family, Mansur said new assets were still being discovered and investigated. "This is an ongoing process."

Cases have been filed based on the assets the authorities have identified so far, and those assets have been seized, he said, without disclosing the amount of the assets.

"Let me give an example, like I had mentioned Islami Bank. Shares worth around Tk 12,000 crore to Tk 15,000 crore are believed to be held there. Similarly, there are shares held in various other banks. As we identify and recover these, we see that there is a significant amount of money in our banking sector that is essentially frozen."

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam at the press briefing said that since the interim government took charge, immovable assets of the 10 groups and Hasina's family worth Tk 1,30,758 crore domestically and \$164.03 million abroad have been attached. Additionally, Tk 42,600 crore movable properties have been frozen.

Mansur said the central bank was working with foreign institutions through mutual legal assistance to recover laundered money.

He said Prof Yunus might take steps related to the recovery process during his London trip scheduled for June 9-13.

"The UK is giving us full support, and their parliamentary committee is assisting us; their experts are providing solutions."

"The Financial Times is supporting us and other newspapers are also helping by publishing various articles in our favour," Mansur said.

"If we look at the US, we are receiving support from there as well. Another country supporting us is Canada. We also have the UAE and Singapore. We have held discussions with the Singaporean government. We spoke to their resident ambassador."

The governor said if Bangladesh can prove that the money involved was indeed taken by the alleged launderers and that the money was illegal, then there is a possibility that the foreign country might cancel their citizenship. "That possibility exists, but it depends on us proving the allegation," he added.

Replying to a question, Mansur said the legal process to bring back laundered money takes around four to five years.

During this time, some intermediate or provisional measures can be taken, for example, freezing the assets that are located abroad, he said.

"This can be done within a year or even sooner, provided that we properly complete the necessary legal procedures in our country."

"After that, we need to send the request abroad through the appropriate channels. This is done through mutual legal assistance."

"We are currently engaged in this process and are in the stage of sending requests. If we receive cooperation from foreign authorities, we will be able to freeze the assets. Once the assets are frozen, formal legal proceedings will begin in court, which typically take four to five years to reach a resolution," he added.

Speaking about those accused of embezzling and laundering money, Mansur said, "I don't believe they are at peace. They are hiring top lawyers. We've heard that S Alam [Mohammed Saiful Alam] will spend \$3 million a year on his legal team. That is not a sign of being at peace."

About the current turmoil involving mobile financial service provider Nagad, Mansur said Nagad's administrative team was unable to function due to the court's decision.

"We have appealed, and we hope to get justice. In the meantime, Nagad could take various actions, such as destroying documents or erasing evidence. However, to ensure that customers' money is not harmed, instructions have been given to the banks. Nagad will not be allowed to transfer any funds through the banks."

A journalist asked why the interim government had not yet taken any legal action against former central bank governors and deputy governors, who were allegedly involved in scams and loan irregularities.

Mansur said the Anti-Corruption Commission, after investigation, can take legal action if it believes that charges can be brought against them.

AFM Shahinul Islam, head of the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, was also present at the briefing.

Protesters step up

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BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday at a programme in Sylhet warned that the ongoing protests in Dhaka may escalate if Ishraque was not allowed to take the oath of office soon.

He said, "People have locked down Nagar Bhaban for days and issued an ultimatum to the local government adviser. The court declared Ishraque the elected mayor, and the Election Commission issued a gazette in his name, yet he is not being sworn in, and excuses are being made. Is this the rule of law?"

The BNP leader accused the chief adviser and the adviser of local government of ignoring court orders and constitutional responsibilities. "If you disregard the court ruling and the Election Commission gazette, are you not directly opposing democracy?"

He urged the authorities concerned to immediately arrange the swearing in of Ishraque as DSCC mayor. "Otherwise, the protest in Dhaka may expand into a larger movement," he warned.

Earlier, LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain on Facebook alleged that the BNP was attempting to shut down Nagar Bhaban to install Ishraque as DSCC mayor. He said Ishraque's swearing in was not feasible due to 10 unresolved legal and procedural complications.

He criticised the protest as an undemocratic attempt to achieve political goals by disrupting public services and causing difficulties for citizens.

Ishraque on Facebook said the mayoral post is not the issue. The protest aims to expose the hidden lust for power among some members of the government.

He alleged that attempts to block the BNP's mayoral candidate revealed the government's real intentions regarding national elections. "No further discussion is acceptable. Those who have abandoned neutrality and acted as representatives of a particular party must resign immediately," Ishraque said.

THE PROTEST

Protesters yesterday again padlocked the main gate of Nagar Bhaban, causing the suspension of all operations, including critical services such as waste management, mosquito control, trade licencing, and the issuance of birth and death certificates.

The prolonged demonstrations have paralysed not only DSCC operations but also disrupted the activities of the LGRD ministry, which shares the Nagar Bhaban premises.

Ministry officials said Adviser Asif Mahmud had been relocated to the National Sports Council building, while Secretary Rezaul Maksud Jahedi has temporarily moved his office to the Secretariat.

Supporters of Ishraque also announced that the sit-in would continue from 10:00am to 5:00pm today, said Moshir Rahman, who leads the demonstrations.

SUFFERINGS

On average, Nagar Bhaban serves between 5,000 and 7,000 citizens a day.

A DSCC official said Zone-1 and Zone-4 of Nagar Bhaban had become non-operational.

A senior official of the DSCC's revenue department confirmed that all revenue-related activities, even at regional offices, are suspended.

"We cannot issue or renew trade licences or process certificates due to the blockade," the official said.

Rafiqul Islam, a resident of Narinda, came to register the births of his twins but had to leave without getting the job done.

"I need their birth certificates to apply for passports as we are planning to go abroad, but I can't proceed now," he told The Daily Star.

The disruption has raised concerns among DSCC engineers and health officials.

"Supervision and paperwork for ongoing projects like road repairs and drainage maintenance are completely halted..." a DSCC engineer said.

Contractors are also facing delays in payments, affecting thousands of labourers and suppliers just weeks before Eid, according to a source in the revenue department.

The DSCC's health department expressed alarm over the suspension of mosquito repellent distribution, warning of a potential dengue outbreak.

Many crucial tasks ahead of Eid have also stopped. These include finalising the tender process for temporary cattle markets, managing waste disposal, and preparing Eidgahs.

An official said, "We usually deploy extra manpower, hire additional vehicles, and coordinate with multiple agencies for Eid waste management, all of which require official letters and logistical planning. But everything is now stalled."

Even preparations for the national Eid congregation at the National Eidgah have come to a halt.

DSCC Administrator Md Shahjahan Mia said, "Garbage trucks can't operate because we can't issue fuel slips. Mosquito repellents are locked in storage."

[Our Sylhet correspondent contributed to this report.]

Betting on a leaner budget

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foreign and local sources, but we'll bring the amount down," Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Sunday.

A key objective is to reduce the country's debt risk from "moderate" to "lower", Ahmed said, adding, "We'll try our best to reduce the budget deficit significantly."

While cutting administrative expenses is difficult, the government plans to curb expenditure by dropping large, capital-intensive infrastructure projects. Ahmed said the government would avoid costly ventures like Payra Port, which requires Tk 200 crore in annual dredging with limited returns. However, select investments such as the Bay Terminal and the metro rail, each costing around \$700-800 million, will move forward.

The government aims to place greater emphasis on labour-intensive development activities, such as roadwork and river excavation, to stimulate the rural economy. "We're looking at projects where local labour will be involved and the money will circulate at the local level. That's how we'll generate employment," said Ahmed, referring to his discussion with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

"We want employment to happen in agriculture and smaller projects, so the pressure on the budget will be less," he said.

In parallel, Bangladesh Bank is placing special focus on providing targeted loan schemes to support women's participation in the economy.

The forthcoming budget will also take a "business-friendly" approach, according to Ahmed. "We'll try to encourage the private sector. We also want to graduate to a phase that increases competitiveness."

Revenue mobilisation will be strengthened through a sweeping review of tax exemptions. "There are



The budget will also address broader social and developmental goals. "We'll increase spending in education, health, and social safety nets," said Ahmed. "We're putting an emphasis on self-employment. Not everyone will just look for jobs - those who are motivated should be able to create their own livelihoods."

This year's fiscal plan will also make a symbolic shift by recognising the role of domestic workers. "We'll mention domestic workers in the budget. They are part of the productive force. Their contribution hasn't been counted so far, but if we monetise it, it will be quite significant," Ahmed said, adding that formal GDP inclusion might happen in future.

Inflation, while still elevated, is expected to ease in the coming months. "Inflation is now decreasing,