

## MYANMAR CONFLICT Junta chief confirms yr-end polls plan

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta chief said the country plans to hold elections in December and January, state media reported yesterday, pressing ahead with polls denounced as a sham by international monitors.

The military deposed Myanmar's civilian government in a 2021 coup which sparked a many-sided civil war, but has promoted its election plans as a pathway to peace.

With members of the former government locked away, opposition groups set to boycott the vote and huge tracts of the country controlled by anti-junta rebels, observers say a fair poll is impossible.

State newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar said junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, speaking at a conference in the capital Naypyidaw on Wednesday, "pledged that the election will be held in December this year and January next year".

It is not clear whether the junta plans to hold the election in phases – a potential sign it would struggle to guarantee security on a single nationwide polling day – or whether the timetable includes a campaign period. On Wednesday, UN special rapporteur on the rights situation in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said the junta is "trying to create this mirage of an election exercise that will create a legitimate civilian government".

**Defence meet in China unable to adopt joint statement  
Says Indian foreign ministry**

REUTERS, New Delhi

Defence ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in China were unable to adopt a joint statement at the end of their talks due to a lack of consensus on referring to "terrorism", the Indian foreign ministry said yesterday.

**India refused to sign document after it omitted reference to the attack on tourists in Indian Kashmir**

"Certain members, member countries, could not reach consensus on certain issues and hence the document could not be finalised on our side," Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal reporters at a weekly media briefing.

"India wanted concerns on terrorism reflected in the document, which was not acceptable to one particular country and therefore the statement was not adopted," he said, without naming the country.

Indian media reported that New Delhi had refused to sign the document after it omitted reference to the April 22 attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Kashmir, in which 26 people were killed.

India blamed Pakistan for the attack but Islamabad rejected the accusation. The attack led to the worst fighting in decades between the nuclear-armed neighbours after India struck what it called "terrorist infrastructure" in Pakistan and Pakistani Kashmir.

Pakistan denied that the targets had anything to do with "terrorism" and that they were civilian facilities.

The foreign ministries of China and Pakistan did not immediately respond to a request for comment on India's statement.

Earlier yesterday, when asked about the joint statement, a Chinese defence ministry spokesperson said the meeting had "achieved successful results", without elaborating.



Women mourn over a national flag-draped coffin during the funeral of an Iranian soldier killed in an Israeli strike several days earlier, in Tehran, yesterday. Iran reopened the airspace over the eastern part of the country, state media reported.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Death sometimes kinder than torture' Relatives recount Israeli air strike on Gaza that devastated their family

AFP, Gaza City

Alaa al-Najjar was tending to wounded children at a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip when the news came through: the home where her own 10 children were staying had been bombed in an Israeli air strike.

The paediatrician, with no means of transport, ran from the Nasser Hospital to the family house in the city of Khan Yunis, a relative told AFP, only to be met with every parent's worst nightmare.

"When she saw the charred bodies, she started screaming and crying," said Ali al-Najjar, the brother of Alaa's husband. Nine of her children were killed, their bodies burned beyond recognition, according to relatives.

Adam had his arm severely wounded and



The tenth, 10-year-old Adam, survived the strike but remains in critical condition, as does his father, Hamdi al-Najjar, also a doctor, who was also at home when the strike hit.

Both are in intensive care at Nasser Hospital. When the body of her daughter Nibal was pulled from the rubble, Alaa screamed her name, her brother-in-law recounted.

The following day, under a tent set up near the destroyed home, the well-respected paediatric specialist sat in stunned silence, still in shock.

Around her, women wept as the sounds of explosions echoed across the Palestinian territory, battered by more than a year and a

half of war.

The air strike last Friday afternoon was carried out without warning, relatives said.

Asked about the incident, the Israeli military said it had "struck a number of suspects who were identified operating from a structure" near its troops, adding that claims of civilian harm were under review.

"I couldn't recognise the children in the shrouds," Alaa's sister, Sahar al-Najjar, said through tears. "Their features were gone."

"It's a huge loss. Alaa is broken," said Mohammed, another close family member.

According to medical sources, Hamdi al-Najjar underwent several operations at the Jordanian field hospital.

Adam had his arm severely wounded and

suffers from severe burns across his body.

"I found my brother's house like a broken biscuit, reduced to ruins, and my loved ones were underneath," Ali al-Najjar said, recalling how he dug through the rubble with his bare hands alongside paramedics to recover the children's bodies.

Now, he dreads the moment his brother

regains consciousness.

"I don't know how to tell him. Should I tell him his children are dead? I buried them in two graves."

"There is no safe place in Gaza," he added with a weary sigh. "Death is sometimes kinder than this torture."

## CEC meets chief adviser

FROM PAGE 2

National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, in a joint statement with BNP leader Amir Khosru, said the meeting went well, and the nation can expect the Election Commission to announce a date for the election soon.

On June 15, CEC Nasir Uddin said the commission would be able to gauge the government's position on the election schedule only after

formal discussions.

On Saturday, the CEC

also said that a free and

fair election is not possible

without the cooperation of

the government no matter

how independent the election

commission is.

The EC is advancing its

preparatory work for the

upcoming national polls, he

added.

The commission has

asked for information from

## 2024 polls were 'dummy, farcical'

FROM PAGE 1

a police helmet and

bulletproof vest.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman began the proceedings by hearing the prosecution side.

S u b - I n s p e c t o r Shamsuzzoha Sarkar of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station, who is investigating the case, submitted a petition seeking a 10 day remand for Awal.

Prosecutor Omar Faruk Faruqi said, "The accused served as the chief election commissioner from 2022 to September 2024. Under his leadership, a disgraceful national election was held on January 7, 2024. Except for the Awami League and one or two other parties, no others participated in that dummy election. It was one-sided, staged, and farcical. He failed to ensure a free and fair election."

Awal's lawyer argued against the remand prayer, saying, "Awal is 70 years old and suffering from multiple chronic diseases. In resisting fascism, let us not become fascists ourselves."

With the court's permission, Awal then said, "The election was indeed a dummy and farcical one."

The magistrate asked, "An election inquiry committee was formed in every district, headed in most cases by a joint district judge. Earlier, the honorarium for this was Tk 22,000, which you increased to Tk 5,00,000. Wasn't this a waste of public money?"

Awal replied that he had no knowledge of the matter, adding that the raise might

authorities regarding minor repairs at educational institutions that are likely to be used as polling centres.

The EC said that it has already made significant progress in several key areas, including updating the voter list, finalising parliamentary constituency boundaries, registering new political parties as well as amendment to the several laws and rules.

shoot me dead."

Pro BNP lawyers began a commotion after this comment.

After nearly half an hour of hearing, the court placed Awal on a three day remand.

Police arrested Awal in the capital's Moghbazar area on Wednesday in a case filed with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on Sunday.

Awal and the other accused face charges of depriving people of their voting rights.

In the same case, another former CEC, KM Nurul Huda, was arrested on Sunday. The next day, a court placed him on a four day remand.

BNP Executive Committee member Salahuddin Khan filed the case, naming 24 individuals. Another former CEC, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, is also accused in the case.

In another development, three more charges, including sedition, have been added to the case.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Minhazur Rahman on Wednesday passed an order in this regard after the investigators filed an application, seeking inclusion of the sections 124A (sedition), 420 (cheating and dishonesty) and 406 (criminal breach of trust) of the penal code, said a court employee.

Evidence of offences punishable under these sections have been found during the investigation, according to the police forwarding report.

The total number of charges in the case now stands at 10.

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(ড. মোহাম্মদ জাকির হোসাইন)

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