Kremlin critic Nadezhdin flees Russia for France

AFP, *Moscow*

Russian anti-war politician Boris Nadezhdin -- who was recently detained outside Moscow and blocked from running for parliament -- said yesterday he had left the country, in a video posted from Paris.

Nadezhdin was one of the few politicians who openly criticised President Vladimir Putin and Moscow's Ukraine offensive to have stayed in the country.

Almost all of Putin's critics are in jail, in exile or dead.

Nadezhdin had been seeking to stand in tightly controlled parliamentary elections in September.

As his campaign ramped up last month, authorities labelled him a "foreign agent", briefly detained him, then fined him 1,000 rubles ($13) for displaying "extremist symbols" in a dramatic hearing that saw paramedics called as his blood pressure spiked.

Amid the pressure -- which would technically have barred him from standing -- he announced he was quitting his campaign, saying he had been "silenced" and "pushed out of politics".



This handout photo taken and released yesterday by Myanmar's Presidential Press and Information Bureau shows detained former civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi meeting with Arnaude de Baecque, resident representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross to Myanmar, in Naypyidaw. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: AFP

US Pacific Fleet commander arrives today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Admiral Stephen Koehler, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka today for three-day official visit to discuss defence partnership and expand maritime security cooperation, US Embassy in Dhaka said in a statement yesterday.



"During his visit, Admiral Koehler plans to meet with senior Bangladeshi officials to discuss the longstanding US-Bangladesh defense partnership and opportunities to expand cooperation on maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and professional military education," it said.

The visit comes just three days after US Special Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor's recent visit to Bangladesh.

Foreign ministry officials said the US-Bangladesh defence cooperation has steadily expanded over the past two decades from traditional military training to maritime security, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, cybersecurity and defence dialogues.

While Bangladesh is not a US treaty ally, it has become an important security partner in the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific.

Road to one-point demand

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women, 10 percent for applicants from disadvantaged districts, 5 percent for ethnic minorities, and 1 percent for people with physical disabilities.

The quota system had long divided public opinion. Supporters defended it as a mechanism for inclusion, while critics argued it undermined merit-based recruitment.

In 2018, following an earlier wave of student protests, the government abolished quotas in most public service recruitment. For many young job-seekers, the controversy appeared settled.

That changed in June 2024 when the High Court restored the quota system by overturning the government's earlier decision. To thousands of students, the verdict represented a reversal of a hard-won reform.

On July 1, activists revived their campaign under the banner of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. Frontline organiser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain later wrote that the name had been chosen deliberately to unite students across institutions and prevent the movement from being identified with a single campus.

The strategy worked. Demonstrations spread rapidly from university to university. Students organised rallies, processions, sit-ins and road blockades. Through the Bangla Blockade programme, they occupied major intersections across Dhaka and brought parts of the capital to a standstill.

Even after the Appellate Division suspended the High Court verdict on July 10, protesters refused to leave the streets. A court decision, they argued, could always be overturned by another court. What they wanted was a permanent solution.

At this stage, however, the movement remained focused. It was all about quota reform.

THE REMARK THAT CHANGED THE MOOD

The first major shift came on July 14.

Responding to the protests, Sheikh Hasina referred to demonstrators as razakars, a term associated with collaborators of the Pakistani military during the 1971 Liberation War. The remark triggered immediate outrage.

Students responded with a slogan that quickly echoed across campuses: "Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakar, Razakar! Ke boleche? Ke boleche? Shoirachar, Shoirachar!' [Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar! Who said that? Who said that? Dictator, dictator!]"

That night, university campuses erupted. Female students joined male classmates in unprecedented numbers on campuses. Looking back, Asif described the agitation as spontaneous.

The remark changed the emotional character of the movement. Many students felt they were not only being ignored, but also being discredited by the government. The protests began to take shape as a movement, something well beyond quota reforms.

BLOOD ON CAMPUS

The following day, the situation escalated. After Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader warned that Chhatra League would give a "fitting reply" to protesters, ruling-party activists attacked demonstrators in several locations, including Dhaka University and Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Videos and photographs of bloodied students spread rapidly across social media. Instead of intimidating the protesters, the attacks generated sympathy and drew new people into the movement.

Then came July 16.

Clashes in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rangpur left several people dead. Among them was Abu Sayed, the student from Rangpur whose death would become one of the defining moments of the uprising. Footage showing him standing with arms outstretched moments before being shot spread across the country.

For many, Abu Sayed's death marked the point at which the movement ceased to be solely about quotas. It became a struggle against state violence.

The government closed educational institutions to weaken the demonstrations. However, students from private universities joined the movement in large numbers, giving it a new momentum. Madrasa students also joined. What had largely been a public university movement evolved into a nationwide student uprising.

THE BREAKING POINT

If July 14 and 16 changed the mood of the movement, July 18 to 20 changed its trajectory.

On July 18, violence spread across the country. Dozens of people were killed in a single day. Police and ruling-party activists confronted students in multiple locations, including private university campuses. By evening, the government imposed a nationwide internet blackout, severing communication and limiting the flow of information.

As casualties mounted, fear gradually gave way to anger. Parents joined their children on the streets. Many Bangladeshis who had not participated directly in the demonstrations began to identify with the protesters.

Then came the curfew and deployment of the military. Some of the most contentious images of the uprising emerged during this period, including footage showing armed personnel firing from helicopters over areas where protesters had gathered. Human rights organisations, journalists and international investigators documented allegations of excessive force.

For the organisers, the political calculation was also changing. According to Asif, as the death toll mounted, the movement's focus shifted from quotas to holding those responsible for the killings accountable.

NO COMING BACK

The student leaders announced a nine-point demand. They sought justice for those killed, punishment for those responsible, compensation for victims' families, the release of detainees and broader accountability measures.

Amid mounting pressure, on July 23, the government finally relented and formally reformed the quota system, making 93 percent of government jobs merit-based.

But it was too little, too late. After so much bloodshed and arbitrary detentions, justice became the call of the day, eclipsing the original demand.

Meanwhile, arrests, raids and allegations of enforced disappearances continued. Public anger intensified when six prominent coordinators, including Asif Mahmud and Nahid Islam, appeared publicly alongside Detective Branch officials to announce the suspension of the movement. Many believed the statement had been made under coercion.

Students escalated protests, demanding the coordinators' release. Thousands changed social-media profile pictures to red in solidarity with the movement. University teachers demonstrated. Lawyers gathered at the High Court. Parents publicly demanded answers for the deaths of their children. Eminent citizens called for independent investigations.

Bangladeshi expatriates around the world also organised protests, lobbied foreign governments and international organisations and sought to draw attention to the crackdown.

THE ROAD TO ONE POINT

By the beginning of August, the movement had clearly outgrown its original identity.

On August 1, the government banned Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The same day, the detained coordinators were released from DB custody.

Momentum continued to build. On August 2, thousands joined the Droho Jatra procession, organised by a group of students and teachers, cultural organisations, and civil society members in Dhaka, demanding the resignation of the Hasina-led government.

Students marched alongside teachers, guardians, lawyers, civil society representatives and cultural activists. Poetry, music and public speeches transformed the demonstrations into something larger than a conventional political protest.

Meanwhile, organisers were engaged in an important internal debate: when should they openly demand Sheikh Hasina's resignation?

According to Asif, the leadership believed such a call would have failed if made too early. They needed to gauge the public sentiment. The leadership therefore chose to wait.

That moment came on August 3.

Amid the ongoing nationwide crackdown, tens of thousands gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar, where the leaders of the student movement announced a single-point demand: resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

The declaration formally gave voice to what had already become the movement's demand.

"We wanted the movement to mature enough so that the announcement would not seem premature," Asif told this newspaper.

"We were waiting for the right moment. After careful observation, it seemed—yes, now was the right time. From that standpoint, we chose August 3 as the date," he said.

The UN fact-finding report later observed that "according to some witness accounts, junior officers on the ground increasingly resisted orders to use firearms against civilian protestors, informing the Army Chief during a large meeting held on 3 August that they did not want to shoot at protesters".

THE FINAL PUSH

The following day, protesters launched a nationwide non-cooperation movement. Violent clashes erupted across the country, leaving many more people dead. Student leaders then announced a March to Dhaka for August 6. However, following a deadly crackdown, the programme was brought forward to August 5.

By then, the movement had united students, teachers, professionals, lawyers, parents, expatriates and ordinary citizens behind a common objective.

On the morning of August 5, thousands defied curfew orders and poured into Dhaka's streets. What had begun five weeks earlier as a campaign to reform a recruitment system had become a nationwide uprising.

Within hours, Sheikh Hasina left the country.

Don't allow Hasina

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Humaiun referred to reports circulating on social media that Hasina may deliver a public statement on August 5 and said that such activities could undermine the positive progress in bilateral relations.

In response, Trivedi assured him that the matter would be given due consideration and that India would make the necessary enquiries and remain attentive to the issue.

Political activities of AL are now banned.

The meeting came ahead of a publicised event in New Delhi, where Hasina is scheduled to make a public appearance virtually before the media on August 5, exactly two years after her government was ousted in a student-led mass uprising.

According to India Today, the event will be hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia (FCC South Asia) in New Delhi, where Hasina is expected to speak about her future plans and her proposed return to Bangladesh.

Since Hasina fled to India, relations between Dhaka and New Delhi have remained strained, although there have been signs of improvement following the formation of the BNP government in February.

Trade restrictions remain in place on both sides, while several key bilateral issues, including water-sharing agreements, remain unresolved amid slow progress in bilateral engagements.

According to the foreign ministry, yesterday's meeting also reviewed various aspects of Bangladesh-India relations and issues of mutual interest.

"They emphasised the importance of maintaining regular dialogue and constructive engagement," the statement said.

In a Facebook post, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka said the discussion focused on expanding people-centric cooperation between the two countries.

Trivedi also reiterated India's intention to work constructively with the Bangladesh government to advance the development aspirations of the people of both countries.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam said India will have to clear whether it supports Hasina's planned online meeting.

"We are moving forward with India with a forward-looking approach. We don't want it to be damaged, and I firmly believe that India doesn't want it either. So, India has to clear whether it is supporting it [online meeting] or not," she told reporters at her ministry yesterday.

"You saw that we had a very cordial meeting with the new high commissioner, who visited the ministry last week. We had a lot of good discussions."

Asked about an invitation to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to attend the BRICS Summit, scheduled to be held in India in September, she indicated that no decision had yet been made.

"Time will tell... I can't tell you now," she said, adding that the PM would decide on overseas visits at an appropriate time.

Death penalty if victim dies

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trials in the absence of accused, admit digital evidence and ensure the confidentiality and security of witnesses, complainants, whistleblowers and victims.

It also recognises victims' right to receive information on the progress of investigations, the actual circumstances of the incident and the whereabouts or fate of the disappeared person.

The proposed law includes provisions for government-funded legal assistance, medical care, rehabilitation and the creation of a compensation fund for victims.

Compensation may be recovered from the property of convicted persons, while the state will provide compensation if such recovery is not possible.

The draft law further allows the use of a disappeared person's property to support the maintenance and necessary expenses of their spouse and dependent family members.

It also provides for issuing a certificate of disappearance after five years to facilitate inheritance proceedings among legal heirs.

The draft law also proposes the establishment of a central database on enforced disappearances and provisions for international cooperation on disappearance-related cases.

In the proposed law, there are provisions to complete investigations within a maximum of 120 days and trials within a maximum of 120 days.

If the disappearance results in death, a body is recovered, or the disappeared person cannot be found alive or dead even after five years, the punishment may be death or life imprisonment along with a fine of up to Tk 1 crore.

During the tenure of the last interim government, the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, 2025, was promulgated.

The cabinet also gave the final approval to the draft of the Transfer of Property (Amendment) Act, 2026, in order to allow the donors to retain the lifetime usufruct rights, enabling them to continue using and enjoying the property during their lifetime.

The Law and Justice Division placed the proposed law in the meeting. The cabinet cleared the draft law, subject to vetting by the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division.

The existing Transfer of Property Act, 1882, did not contain any specific provision allowing parents or grandparents to donate property to their children or grandchildren while securing their legal right to use the property for the rest of their lives. The proposed law seeks to address that gap by providing legal protection for such arrangements.

Besides, the Cabinet approved a proposal to cancel the Essential Medicines List 2026 and the Drug Pricing Method 2026 as the two instruments were prepared without the mandatory consultation with the National Drug Advisory Council, as required under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 2023.

The validity of the Essential Medicines List and the drug pricing mechanism introduced in January 2026 was challenged before the High Court, where the matter is now pending.

Gas crisis ripples across economy

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The inadequate supply has forced many factories to rely on costly alternatives such as CNG or diesel, while production losses have ranged from 40 percent to as high as 80-90 percent.

Although some factories continue limited operations to meet urgent export orders, they are unable to maintain normal production levels.

Critical processes such as double dyeing and finishing require much higher gas pressure and, in many cases, have come to a halt, Sarwar said.

As a result, unfinished goods are piling up, delivery schedules are being disrupted and financial losses are mounting throughout the textile and garment supply chain, he said.

The garment industry is currently operating at around 40 percent of its normal production capacity because of the gas supply crisis, said Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

While some factories have experienced production declines of up to 60 percent, others have seen losses of 10-20 percent.

The industry's greatest concern is not the temporary increase in production costs but the risk of delayed shipments and the potential loss of buyers' confidence, Khan said.

Although the additional costs incurred during the disruption may eventually be recovered, damaged business relationships and missed delivery deadlines could have longer-term consequences for Bangladesh's apparel export sector, he said.

Mostafa Kamal, chairman of Meghna Group of Industries, said many of the conglomerate's manufacturing units were operating at only one-third of their normal capacities or remaining idle.

The gas and power disruption has also affected the production of essential commodities.

The impact is particularly severe at the group's cement plant, which has a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes a day but is currently producing less than 5,000 tonnes because of power shortages.

Its chemical plant is also operating at a minimal level, disrupting the production of PVC and soda despite strong domestic demand and export orders, Kamal said.

The Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers and Exporters Association has also written to Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution seeking uninterrupted gas supply, saying around 20 ceramic factories in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Narsingdi and Mymensingh are facing severe disruption.

In the letter dated July 29, the association said factories requiring around 15 psi of gas pressure were sometimes receiving 0-3 psi.

As ceramic production depends on a continuous gas supply to operate kilns, the disruption is halting production and causing damage to products and machinery, the association said.

The association of 70 factories warned that international buyers had already started cancelling orders because manufacturers could not guarantee timely delivery.

The problem is not limited to large manufacturers; small and medium businesses are also struggling as unreliable gas and electricity supplies reduce operating hours and increase their dependence on costly alternatives.

The crisis is also hitting homes, particularly in areas where piped-gas pressure has become too weak for cooking.

Many families are being forced to rely on LPG as an alternative or electric burners, adding to their energy costs at a time when electricity outages are also becoming more frequent.

Iran denies US talks underway

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pass the critical trade corridor, firing on commercial ships.

On Sunday, a tanker off the coast of Oman reported hearing an explosion nearby, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre reported, but the ship and crew were all reported safe, reports AFP.

Shipping data showed that two tankers laden with Saudi oil crossed the Bab el-Mandeb strait over the weekend, while traffic in the Strait of Hormuz slowed following reports of vessel attacks.

The number of commodity vessels that passed through the Bab el-Mandeb strait fell to 18 on Sunday, from 27 on Saturday and 28 on Friday, according to the Kpler data.

Six Saudi-flagged supertankers have changed course in the Gulf of Aden in recent days and are heading to southern Africa following threats by Yemen's Houthi movement to target Saudi shipping, another tracking data showed.

Oil prices skidded and US and European stock futures rose yesterday as hopes of a peace deal in the Middle East grew, while the yen firmed to a three-month high after the US and Japan confirmed joint intervention to prop up the frail currency.