

# Ducsu VP urges AL to rein in BCL

DU CORRESPONDENT

Ducsu Vice-President Nurul Haque Nur yesterday urged the Awami League government to keep a tight rein on Chhatra League’s “desperate activities” in order to avert “collapse of the government”.

“The mass awakening against the misrule and oppression cannot be suppressed by Chhatra League,” Nur said while addressing a protest rally held at the base of Raju Memorial Sculpture.

Santrash Birodhi Chhatra Oikya, an alliance comprising 12 student organisations of the campus, organised the rally to press home their four-point demand.

The demanded expulsion of those who were involved in the torture of four students at Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall and the attack on the Ducsu VP on December 22 last year.

Their other demands include resignation of the proctor for his failure to protect the students, allotting seats to the students from first year, and ousting outsiders and non-students from the dormitories to ensure a safe and democratic campus.

Referring to the incident of Zahurul Haq Hall, Nur said the students did not commit any offense.

“Chhatra League leaders claimed the students were members of Shibir, but after talking to them, we came to know that they were beaten for not attending various political programmes of Chhatra League in the past,” Nur said.

After the rally, the alliance members brought out a procession on the campus.

Meanwhile, Mukim Chowdhury, one of the four students who were tortured, continued his sit-in yesterday demanding justice.

“I was beaten brutally after being falsely accused. I will not move from this place until I get justice,” Mukim told The Daily Star.

Around 50 students of the tourism and hospitality management department, of which Mukim is a student, formed a human chain at the base of Raju Memorial Sculpture demanding justice for their classmate.

Chhatra League activists of Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall tortured Mukim Chowdhury and three other students for nearly three hours before handing them to police early Tuesday.

The three others are Sanwar Hossain of political science department, Minhaz Uddin of Islamic History, and Afsar Uddin of Arabic.

## Bangladesh moves

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of Anti-Corruption Commission, especially in case of “big fish”; shrinking media and civil society space; lack of tolerance of dissent; deficit in trust about end-result of high-profile anti-corruption drive; deficit in political integrity and linkage of politics with big money and corruption; political and policy decisions reflecting powerful vested groups with little reflection of public interest; and deficit in electoral integrity and transparency of political or electoral finance.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) disclosed the findings of the global survey report at its Dhanmondi office in the capital yesterday.

“We would have been a bit more satisfied if progress had been made both in terms of ranking and score. Then we could say there was improvement,” TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said while sharing the findings with the media.

“But we are not saying that there was no improvement. What happened shows a mixed picture,” he said.

Responding to a query, Iftekharuzzaman said it could be the case that some countries did even worse than Bangladesh and slipped to lower positions, paving the way for Bangladesh to go up on the index.

Bangladesh ranks 146th among 180 countries surveyed. The previous year, it was at the 149th position among 180 countries.

On the latest index, Angola, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Mozambique and Nigeria also scored 26, same as Bangladesh did.

At the press conference, Iftekharuzzaman lauded Bangladesh’s progress in different socio-economic indicators in recent years and said such progress could have been even better if “we had been able to ensure good governance and fight corruption more effectively.”

He also said, “Because of graft, opportunity cost is much higher [in Bangladesh].”

Voicing concern over the reported involvement of some Anti-Corruption Commission officials in graft, Iftekharuzzaman said what happened in such cases was that departmental actions were taken against the officials in question, but their exemplary punishment was not ensured.

If the commission wants to gain people’s trust, it must ensure integrity within it, he said.

Iftekharuzzaman also said Bangladesh’s institutional and legal capacity to combat graft was very high, but the problem was that the capacity was not being properly utilised.

“Sadly, we can see a connection between graft and a section of those who are entitled to and bestowed with the power to utilise the capacity,” he said, adding that graft was increasing because of that section of people.

Referring to the report, the TIB executive director said the countries where integrity in political and electoral practices is high have fared better on the index.

On the other hand, the countries that failed to ensure participatory and inclusive elections, among other factors, ranked low, he said.

In the report, the TI also gave several recommendations for improving Bangladesh’s score on the index.

One of the recommendations is ensuring the effective implementation of the prime minister’s declaration of “zero tolerance” to corruption.

The report also recommended that impunity is effectively challenged and corrupt people, irrespective of status or identity, are brought to justice.

The TI called upon the authorities concerned to ensure robust access to information as well as faster, wider and deeper digitisation.

Bangladesh was included in the CPI in 2001. It was at the very bottom during the 2001-2005 period.

Among the South Asian countries, Bhutan holds the top position on the CPI 2019. It scored 68 and ranked 25th. Scoring 41, India was at the 80th position.

CPI 2019
Bangladesh gave a “mixed” performance, no room for “complaisance”
High-profile graft being rarely addressed, weakening institutions of accountability, shrinking media space among possible factors behind result
Data from eight international surveys used for the Bangladesh part of the index
Out of 180 countries surveyed, 131 scored below 50 while 108 scored less than the global average of 43
Denmark and New Zealand the least corrupt country, Somalia the most

These two countries are followed by Sri Lanka (score 38; 93rd position), Nepal (score 34; 113th position), Pakistan (score 32; 120th position), Maldives (score 29; 130th position), Bangladesh and Afghanistan (score 16; 173rd position).

Globally, Denmark and New Zealand are the least corrupt countries, with both scoring 87. The other top least corrupt countries include Finland, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Netherlands, Germany and Luxemburg, according to the report.

No country has scored 100 out of 100.

Out of the 180 countries surveyed, 131 countries scored below 50 while 108 or 60 percent countries scored less than the global average of 43.

Score declined for 68 countries, increased for 60 countries and remained unchanged for 52 countries.

Somalia is the most corrupt country with the lowest score of 9, according to the index.

### DATA SOURCES

The TI’s global survey has accumulated data from 13 international surveys and for the period of December, 2017 to October, 2019.

For Bangladesh, data has been collected from eight international surveys.

Those are: World Economic Forum- Executive Opinion Survey; Economist Intelligence Unit- Country Risk Assessment; World Justice Project-Rule of Law Index; Political Risk Service (PRS) International Country Risk Guide; Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index; Information Handling Services (HIS) Global Insight Country Risk Ratings; World Bank- Country Policy and Institutional Assessment; and Varieties of Democracy Project.

The CPI was introduced in 1995.

## KSA deports

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which landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 11:20pm Wednesday.

Another flight of the same airline carrying the landed at the airport with 114 more workers around 1:10am yesterday, says the NGO-based initiative which provides support to such migrant workers returning from various countries at the airport.

Upon their arrival, Brac Migration Programme with help of Prabashi Kalyan Desk set by Expatriates’ Welfare Ministry at the airport provided immediate support, including food and drinking water, to the latest deportees from Saudi Arabia.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said from the accounts of the returnees, it is clear that they all went to Saudi Arabia with the hope for a better future after being assured by brokers and recruiting agencies.

However, they faced various problems after going there, he said.

“Many of them were not paid their wages while some of them returned within a few months,” he added.

Shariful said the returning workers are now worried about their future.

Earlier in 2019, Saudi Arabia deported 25,789 Bangladeshi workers, according to Brac data.

# Sir Fazle Abed’s family receives Yidan Prize

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compassion, courage and conviction. He inspired everyone around him to choose optimism over despair and to believe in the potential of human spirit. I believe that Sir Fazle will continue to be a source of inspiration for the world,” Dr Yidan said at the award ceremony.

“The hundreds of millions of lives he transformed, especially those from the most vulnerable and poorest communities, will remember him as the spark of hope. The Yidan Prize Foundation will continue to work closely with Brac to further scale up impactful educational programmes in Asia, Africa and beyond.

“Together, we can continue to help young, marginalised children find joy in their learning and those deprived of resources live happy and productive lives.”

In September 2019, Sir Fazle Abed, an iconic figure in international development, was awarded the Yidan Prize for Education Development for his ground-breaking work on

education.

While visiting Sir Fazle Abed in October 2019, the Yidan Prize Foundation learned about his visionary approach and pivotal role in changing the course of education in Bangladesh.

After Sir Fazle Abed’s passing on December 20, 2019, Dr Yidan decided to visit Dhaka to pay his respects and present the award in person to his family.

During his two-day stay in Dhaka, Dr Yidan visited a Brac school in Korail slum in Banani and an early childhood development centre, Play Lab, in Banasree.

Shameran read out the acceptance speech Sir Fazle drafted last year after the announcement of the award.

“I would like to express my gratitude for the recognition bestowed upon both Brac and me. The very generous Yidan Prize funding will allow us to expand our education activities further. I believe that education is the greatest equaliser. I envision a world where

even the poorest among us have the opportunity to lead lives of purpose and dignity. I humbly request everyone to play their part in making this vision a reality,” Shameran read.

“We are most honoured to receive the Yidan Prize on behalf of our father,” said Tamara Abed. “We are committed to carrying his legacy forward.”

As a Yidan Prize Laureate, Sir Fazle received a gold medal, a certificate and HK\$30 million (around US\$3.9 million), half of which was in cash and the other half in project fund.

“Addressing the needs of children in the most disadvantaged communities has always been a core priority for Brac. The Yidan Prize will support us in scaling up our play-based early childhood development solutions in Uganda and Tanzania and develop a new model of play-based childcare in Bangladesh,” said Asif Saleh, executive director of Brac.

The Yidan Prize project funding will be invested by Brac in research, innovation and scaling up of high-

impact solutions related to early childhood development in the next three years.

Brac will also use part of the project fund to pilot a social enterprise of play-based childcare model in Bangladesh.

### THE YIDAN PRIZE

Founded in 2016 by Dr Yidan, a core founder of Tencent, the Yidan Prize’s mission is to create a better world through education.

It consists of two awards, the Yidan Prize for Education Research and the Yidan Prize for Education Development.

To ensure transparency and sustainability, the prize is managed by the Yidan Prize Foundation and governed by an independent trust with an endowment of HK\$2.5 billion (around US\$323 million).

Through a series of initiatives, the prize aims to establish a platform for the global community to engage in conversations around education and to play a role in education philanthropy.

## A forgotten promise

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“It seems to me that the Indian government is not considering the killings a problem. At the same time, we are not raising the point properly. Imagine what would happen if a single such death happened along the India-Pakistan border,” he added.

Bangladesh should protest strongly and take effective steps to stop the killings, he said.

Bangladesh is surrounded by India on three sides and the two countries share 4,156 kilometres of border, the world’s fifth-longest.

In a meeting of the director generals of the BSF and Border Guard Bangladesh last December in Delhi, Indian officials said they would remain cautious and avoid the

“undesirable deaths”.

On January 11, Foreign Minister AK Momen told reporters: “India promised [that] not even a single person would die in the border areas. Unfortunately, border killing is a reality. We are concerned”.

It is often said that the killings are an outcome of cattle smuggling.

But cattle smuggling has reduced a lot in recent years because Bangladesh is self-sufficient in meat production.

A year before India’s ban on cattle export in 2014, around 2.3 million cattle were brought to Bangladesh from India during the Eid-ul-Azha. The number fell to 92,000 in 2019, according to BGB data.

Of the 43 Bangladeshis killed last

year, 37 were shot dead while the rest were tortured to death. The BGB maintains that 35 people were killed by the BSF last year.

The death toll was 24 in 2017, 31 in 2016, and 46 in 2015, according to ASK.

### FOUR KILLED YESTERDAY

Three men were shot dead at Porsha border in Naogaon and one man was tortured to death at Putkhali border in Jashore’s Sharsa upazila.

In Naogaon’s Porsha, Mofizul, 35, of Bishnupur, Sandwip, 32, of Bizli, and Kamal Hossain, 34, of Patapukur, were shot dead, a BGB official told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

In a BGB-BSF meeting in the afternoon, BSF officials regretted the

killings. Lt Col AKM Ariful Islam of BGB Battalion-16 told The Daily Star.

Locals told our correspondent in Chapainawabganj that BSF members detained another 27-year-old man named Kabil, who was with the three victims.

The man tortured to death was Hanef Ali Khoka, 35, of Agrabhulat area in Sharsa. Locals said he was detained on Wednesday.

Mofizul’s body was recovered in the afternoon from the Bangladesh side, said Shahinur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Porsha Police Station.

In Jashore, Hanef was caught by BSF men of Bannabaria camp Wednesday afternoon, said Tabuibar Rahman, local union parishad member.

# Uniform entry test from next academic year

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university-set requirement, he said.

Asked whether it would be a written or multiple-choice questions exam, he said the admission procedure would be finalised in detail soon.

“We will soon sit with VCs of four universities, which are run under the 1973 university act, and other leading universities to have a detailed discussion on introducing the uniform admission test,” Prof Alamgir said.

Last year, seven public agricultural universities introduced the uniform admission test, known as “the cluster system”. The other 38 public universities held separate entry tests.

Besides the agricultural universities, medical colleges have a uniform entrance test.

The decision of uniform admission test comes after President Abdul Hamid, also chancellor of all public universities, on several occasions asked the public universities to hold

admission tests centrally to reduce hassles of the admission seekers and their guardians.

The UGC too wanted to introduce the uniform admission test.

Every year, admission seekers face a huge amount of pressure when they prepare for separate tests for separate universities.

The candidates buy admission forms from different universities and spend a lot of time and money for travel and accommodation. They travel, often with parents or guardians, across the country and sometimes have to check in hotels to take part in admission tests.

There are cases when candidates even take separate tests for a seat at separate faculties, even separate departments, under the same university. Sometimes the dates of admission tests of different universities coincide.

To ease the admission seekers’

hassles, the education ministry in 2010 decided to introduce the uniform admission test, dubbed as cluster system.

It suggested that universities of similar characteristics be brought under a cluster for which a single admission test would be held.

Under the system, admission seekers would be enrolled at public universities based on the merit list prepared from one single test.

For example, students would take one test for a place in any of the science and technology universities and another test for a place in any of the agricultural universities.

But some public universities have been opposing the idea as its implementation would cut the income of the universities and teachers from the sale of admission forms, invigilation and checking of answer scripts, said officials of the education ministry and UGC.

## Millions on lockdown

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which begins tomorrow.

The previously unknown virus strain is believed to have emerged late last year from illegally traded wildlife at an animal market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Most transport in Wuhan, a city of 11 million people, was suspended yesterday and people were told not to leave. Hours later, neighbouring Huanggang, a city of about 7 million people, announced a similar lockdown.

“The lockdown of 11 million people is unprecedented in public health history,” Gauden Galea, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) representative in Beijing, said.

Other cities were also taking steps to restrict movement and contact.

Nearby Ezhou shut train stations. China’s Education Ministry said schools should not hold large events or exams. The capital cancelled major public events, including two Lunar New Year temple fairs, the state-run Beijing News said.

Airports worldwide were screening passengers arriving from China. Hong Kong, which has two confirmed cases, is turning two holiday camps into quarantine stations as a precaution. Taiwan has banned anyone from Wuhan from going to the island.

Singapore yesterday confirmed its

first case of the new SARS-like virus. The Ministry of Health (MOH) said the patient was a 66-year-old man from Wuhan who arrived in Singapore with his family on Monday, reports AFP.

An Indian nurse working at a hospital in southern Saudi Arabia has been infected by the coronavirus, India’s minister of state for external affairs said yesterday.

Chinese people had their own ways of protecting themselves.

“I go straight to where I need to go, and then I go home,” said 79-year-old Li Meihua, from behind a mask, on the streets of Shanghai. “My nose is a bit runny already. I’m also maintaining a cleaner diet, I’ve turned vegetarian now.”

There is no vaccine for the virus, which can spread through respiratory transmission. Symptoms include fever, difficulty in breathing and cough, similar to many other respiratory illnesses.

Preliminary research suggested it was passed on to humans from snakes, but government medical adviser Zhong Nanshan has also identified badgers and rats as possible sources.

### WHO MEETING

The WHO was set to decide yesterday whether to declare the outbreak a global health emergency, which would step up the international response.

If it does so, it will be the sixth

international public health emergency to be declared in the last decade. Its Emergency Committee meeting was under way in Geneva and a news conference was expected after 1800 GMT.

Some experts believe the virus is not as dangerous as previous coronaviruses such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome.

“The early evidence at this stage would suggest it’s not as severe,” Australia’s Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy said.

Giving the latest details on infections in China, state television said 634 cases had been confirmed. By the end of Wednesday, China’s National Health Commission confirmed 17 dead.

Of the known cases worldwide, Thailand has confirmed four, while Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the United States have reported one each.

Imperial College London said on Wednesday it estimated a total of 4,000 cases in Wuhan alone as of January 18, based on the number of cases reported in China and elsewhere.

To try to stem the outbreak, Wuhan shut down all urban transport networks and suspended outgoing flights from 10:00 am. Domestic

media said some airlines were operating after the deadline, however.

Its Hankou rail station was nearly deserted, state broadcasts showed. State media reported highway toll booths around Wuhan were closing, effectively cutting off road exits. Guards were patrolling highways, one resident told Reuters.

As the city slipped into isolation, residents thronged into hospitals for checks and scrambled for supplies, clearing out supermarket shelves and queuing for petrol.

Authorities in Huanggang ordered indoor entertainment venues including cinemas and internet cafes to close.

In contrast with its secrecy over the 2002-03 SARS that killed nearly 800 people, China’s Communist Party government has provided regular updates to avoid panic ahead of the holidays.

During a visit to Wuhan, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said authorities needed to be open about the virus and efforts to contain it, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Despite China’s response, world shares fell yesterday, led by the biggest tumble in Chinese stocks in more than eight months, as concern mounted about the outbreak. China’s yuan fell to a two-week low.

## Oldest mushroom

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author and geologist Steeve Bonneville of the Free University of Brussels.

The fossilised remains of the fungal mycelium — a vast underground network of root-like filaments for extracting nutrients from the soil — were discovered in rocks dating back to between around 715–810 million years.

The ancient rocks containing the fungus are part of the collection of the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium, while lies just outside of Brussels.

The fungi were found in rocks that formed in a transitional area between water and the land.

This fact, explained Professor Bonneville, “leads us to believe these microscopic mushrooms were important partners of the first plants that colonised the Earth’s surface around 500 million years ago.”

The origin of mushrooms has

mystified evolutionary experts for centuries.

Their delicate nature means that their fossils are extremely rare — not to mention difficult to tell apart from other microorganisms.

Around 120,000 species of fungi have been described by taxonomists — but their global biodiversity is still not fully understood.

A 2017 estimate suggests there may be between 2.2 and 3.8 million different species. Until now, the oldest confirmed mushroom was 460 million years old.

Prof Bonneville and colleagues analysed the new mushroom in microscopic detail using state of the art scanning devices that let them identify it from its molecular composition.

They even detected traces of chitin — a very tough compound that is found in the cell walls of fungi.