

Yunus spells out

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This is the best time to get heard.

"Voters want to vote, and want to vote for a person they admire, rather than be compelled to vote out of party loyalty, or on some other considerations. Voters must create their own choice. If political parties offer corrupt candidates, people will put up their own clean candidates. If we don't do that we'll continue to be the most corrupt country in the world, and our dreams will never get a chance."

He proposed that the voters create their own option and tell the political parties who is to be nominated in their constituency. If none of their candidates is nominated, voters will be free to submit blank ballots as a protest.

"Voters must start speaking out their minds from now on. Rather than speculating about who is going to get which party's nomination, party supporters and independent voters have to start speaking out who they think should be nominated. This year people should get themselves heavily involved in the nomination process. This will be the only way to get the bad people out, and good people in."

The loudest message the voters must give to the political parties is, "We shall not give votes to a candidate who is known to be corrupt, who is known to have amassed wealth by misusing his power and authority or using his power to terrorise people," Yunus said, urging all civic groups, associations, professionals, farmers and women to prepare and submit their panels to the political parties.

"When sending the chosen names for party nominations to respective party, voters should give those names also to the press. Voters should keep lobbying with the parties to let them know how strongly they (voters) feel against the potential party candidate and promote the case of their own candidate," he added.

"I invite the media to... start a series of reports identifying and highlighting at least three potential clean candidates for each contesting political party, in each constituency," Yunus said.

To resolve the feud between the two leading political parties, he requested both the sides to find a respected person acceptable to both, who will come up with a solution package in consultation with them.

Yunus observed, "Important thing is to hold the election in the right manner, and right mood, to uphold our democracy and move forward."

"World is changing very fast. If we are late by a day we'll fall behind by years. We have come a long way and we are ready to go forward with speed. Bangladesh has the fire in her belly to keep pace with her giant neighbours. Let us not allow ourselves to slow down. We need the right politics and the right leadership to mobilise the tremendous energy in Bangladeshi young people."

"A section of our politicians finds it a very attractive theme to impress on the common people of Bangladesh that India is behind all the terrible things that happen in Bangladesh. If you don't vote for our party, India will turn Bangladesh into her client state."

The pioneer of microcredit pointed out that in the world of today, domination does not come through sneaky conspiracies but from economic power. "If we remain a poor country, everybody will dominate us, not just India. Moving up the economic ladder quickly is the best protection from all dominations."

To move up in this ladder, he suggested Bangladesh should open up all doors. "Let people, products, investments from all over the world flow into Bangladesh, and out of Bangladesh, with utmost ease, safety, and efficiency... Let's build everything in Bangladesh in such a way that Bangladesh becomes the natural first choice of hard-nosed investors and traders."

To make Bangladesh an international cross-road, the nation has to reduce corruption drastically, ensure proper supply of electricity all over the country, open up information communication technology, build a mega-port in Chittagong coastline, capable of serving Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, eastern India, Myanmar and south-western China, and construct highways to connect the mega port with these countries, the renowned economist thought.

"Our biggest worry is corruption... There is no way out but to eliminate corruption in politics, from where the infectious disease of corruption spreads around," he observed.

"Geographically, Bangladesh is strategically located to provide access to international shipping to Nepal, Bhutan, Eastern India, Myanmar and South-Western China... We'll have to do our homework well to show them the benefits according to them by opening up the access to the sea-routes through Bangladesh, and doing business with Bangladesh. We'll have to resolve formidable political and technical issues with India. Remaining passive is not at all to our interest."

"Mega-port at Chittagong is the key to making Bangladesh the cross-road of the region. With the economy of the region growing at a sustained high speed, demand for the access to a well-equipped well-managed port will keep on growing. A region, which includes two giant economies, will be desperately looking for direct shipping facilities to reach out to the world. Chittagong will offer the region the most attractive option," he

1,000 feared

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said, adding, the mega-port may support an international airport in its proximity.

He noted, "Human resource is our best resource. We must pay our top priority to make sure our young generation gets prepared to play important roles in a global framework. It is nothing but utter disgrace that we have allowed some of our young people to turn into suicide bombers... We must take the blame without any excuses, and must ensure that no other young man has to choose the path of suicide for any reason."

"If we want to create a dramatically different next generation, we should encourage children to explore and discover the world through providing them with 100-dollar laptops at the school level."

"The world that these young people will create will be the world of innovative ideas. Old resistance to new ideas will crumble away... Our education system has to be oriented towards promoting creativity in our young people."

In recent times, Bangladesh's image has been hurt by its being the most corrupt country in the world and the events in which suicide bombers are killing innocent people, he pointed out.

To counter this negative image, Yunus said, the nation should uphold its positive achievements. Bangladesh is respected globally for being the birth place of microcredit. The nation is also remembered as the country which gave the world oral saline to combat diarrhoea. It earned respectability by demonstrating her skill and efficiency in disaster management. Bangladesh is cited as a success story in producing enough food to feed her people despite doubling the population in 35 years.

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam paid deep respects to the founding leaders of the newspaper and thanked the people for retrieving democracy from autocratic rule in 1990, which in turn has restored freedom to all including the media.

"Why does Bangladesh need a free media? Some may feel... that Bangladesh's first priority is eradication of poverty, economic growth, proper health services... and not a free media... We need all of the above and we also need a free media," he said, adding that without a free media none of the above will be achieved.

Free media has been the unflinching supporter and partner of everything positive that has taken place in the country in the last 15 years, Anam noted.

He stressed that Bangladesh needs a free media to strengthen democracy, ensure human rights, good governance and cultural diversity and build a multi-religious multi-ethnic and tolerant society.

"It needs a free media to fully realise the potential of the Bengalee people," he observed.

"Many of our policymakers are yet to realise that they cannot create a free market economy without a free marketplace of ideas. There cannot be any competitiveness in any sphere of life if there is no competitiveness of mind and freedom is the basis of such competitiveness," Anam said. "Freedom drives away all forms of prejudice, bigotry and extremism."

He went on, "The future of Bangladesh depends on how we can strengthen and give institutional shape to democracy. We hold this to be self-evident truth that without a flourishing democracy there will be no flourishing Bangladesh. We have had our trust with dictatorships and autocracies and they simply do not work."

Today two Bangladeshs exist simultaneously -- a regenerative one and a degenerative one, he said. "We have no doubt that the regenerative Bangladesh will win... But there are also some dark clouds of terrorism on the horizon that we need to collectively defeat and uproot."

"In recent days, we have noticed that different platforms are being used to lash out against the media with sometimes false and very often distorted versions of events. Attempts are afoot to use quasi-judicial bodies to harass the press," he said. "We have no hesitation in asserting that whatever gains of democracy we have been able to enjoy over the last 15 years it was fundamentally due to the vigilant role of the free and independent media."

Bangladesh would have been on a far worse shape otherwise, he added.

In order to increase the pace of growth, Anam said, the country obviously needs better governance, lessening of corruption and eradication of poverty among other issues. None of these goals can be achieved without a free press.

"If we look around the world, we can definitely say that countries having relatively less corruption are all those that enjoy a high degree of free media."

Anam said, "Twenty-first century is one of immense opportunities. We in The Daily Star promise to bring the latest information about all of them to your doorstep."

Thousands ready

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pilgrimage to Mecca were heading toward Safaga 600km southeast of Cairo, when contact was lost shortly after the last reported distress signal at around 2400 GMT Thursday.

Gathered in an area on the edge of Safaga port dubbed "the pilgrims' village" and initially designed for passengers returning from Mecca, families listened to officials reading out the names of the passengers.

The Al-Salam Maritime Transport company that owns the ship said that 1,318 passengers were on board -- including 1,200 Egyptians and 100 Saudis -- and 97 crew members.

Sayed, the hospitalized survivor, told AFP: "Everything happened very quickly. In less than 10 minutes the ship went upside down and we were in the water."

Bitterly, he went on: "The first person to get into a lifeboat was the captain."

The captain was however numbered among the missing. Some of those rescued said they had seen him fall from his lifeboat.

Sayed, who survived thanks to a lifevest, lost touch with four travelling companions. "There were not enough lifeboats for everybody."

Another survivor, 26-year-old Egyptian Kadhab Abdel Monem, agreed about the lack of lifeboats, "clung to an empty barrel," he said from his hospital bed.

"The fire, the smoke, the people climbing up to the bridge, the ship-wreck. A real nightmare," he murmured as a medical team hustled around him.

Andrea Odone, an official working for the Egyptian owners of the ferry, said the number of passengers on board was less than the permitted maximum of 1,487. The ship was "in total conformity with international safety regulations."

One of the ship's sister vessels sank in the Red Sea last October after a collision with a Cypriot tanker.

The Italian firm that certified the ship's seaworthiness is facing prosecution in France for allegedly failing to carry out proper checks on the Maltese-flagged tanker Erika which broke up off the coast of France six years ago.

Survivors said the fire broke out at around 1930 GMT Thursday two hours out of Duba, and the ship sank early Friday (2300 GMT Thursday).

"I spent nearly four hours in the water with my lifejacket before being pulled into a lifeboat," said Abdel Rahim Ahmad, 49, adding that there had been many women and children on board the ill-fated ferry.

The first survivors, mostly men, arrived at the hospital here 24 hours after the drama. Barefooted, with blankets over their shoulders, they were greeted by doctors and given little bags of food -- juice, potato chips, chocolate.

Out of some 1,400 passengers only 140 arrived alive Saturday at the two hospitals in Hurghada, while a body was sent to the morgue, according to hospital assistant director Imadeddin Hindi.

IMF okays \$97m

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Incentives in the context of the FY07 budget."

He also said, "The implementation of fiscal policy has continued to be prudent, and the authorities remain committed to protecting fiscal sustainability. However, determined efforts to improve revenue collections are vital for funding development expenditure and social spending aimed at poverty reduction without jeopardising fiscal sustainability."

The proposed monetary programme in Bangladesh Bank's monetary policy statement is consistent with the authorities' inflation and international reserves objectives. Given still high money and credit growth, however, the Bangladesh Bank will likely need to use open market operations more actively to tighten the monetary stance further and to raise interest rates on treasury securities in order to contain inflation.

"Despite some improvements, the continued poor financial condition of the NCBs underlines the urgency for decisive actions in this area. The implementation of the bank-by-bank resolution strategies will require strong political support, close monitoring, and technical assistance."

The IMF board also reviewed Bangladesh's poverty reduction strategy paper, "Unlocking the Potential--the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR)."

Kato said, "A full poverty reduction strategy, titled "Unlocking the Potential--the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR)", was finalised and published. The authorities' policies under the PRGF arrangement have been designed to enable Bangladesh to make progress in achieving its economic and poverty reduction goals."

Meeting these challenges will require steadfast implementation of structural reforms and credible actions to enhance governance. Accelerated implementation of reforms of the NCBs, tax administration, and the trade system will also contribute to improved governance and the investment climate. In view of the authorities' limited technical capacity, continued donor assistance will be required for successful implementation of the NSAPR."

Bangladesh's economy has performed well under the PRGF-supported programme. The economy has continued to expand, and inflation has been kept in check. Nonetheless, Bangladesh remains a country with a high degree of poverty, serious capacity constraints, and heavy reliance on donor inflows. The authorities will need to maintain sound policies and steadily pursue key structural reforms and capacity building for many years to achieve the objectives outlined in the poverty reduction strategy. After some slippage, key reform measures in tax administration and in the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) have been implemented."

Referring to the government's press note, Hasina said mass arrests, creating obstacles to rallies and attacks on opposition processes, rather than the long march, will tarnish the country's image.

"How can firing, attack and torture on common people and seizure of transports be legal if a peaceful long march is illegal?" she asked, adding, "Does the government want to deprive people of the freedom of speech?" she asked.

The opposition leader urged all the party leaders and lawyers to help the innocent people who have been arrested ahead of their long march.

Hasina directed the 14-party leaders and workers to brave all police and ruling party cadres resistance and

15th anniversary

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economic leaders, and other successful entrepreneurs.

The celebration commenced with the inauguration of a photo exhibition in the evening.

Prof Yunus presented the keynote speech at the Plenary Hall of the venue. Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam delivered the welcome address while Chairperson of the Mediaworld, the owning company of the daily, Rokia A Rahman made the closing remarks.

According to the long march control room at the AL Bangabandhu Avenue central office, the marches from Narsingdi and Sonargaon will enter the city through Jatrabari, from Savar through Gabtoli, from Tongi through Uttara and from Mawa through Keraniganj.

Opposition supporters in Comilla and Mawa were on way to Sonargaon and Keraniganj, one was obstructed by the police on way to Tongi and the fifth reached Narsingdi in part, with the rest trying to break through police barricade.

The march from Mymensingh also faced police obstruction. The law enforcers stopped a number of buses carrying opposition men from Jamalpur and Sherpur to join the march from Mymensingh towards Dhaka.

The police were acting as per the directives of a high-level home ministry meeting held on Wednesday night issued to the opposition leaders to take every measure to stop the marchers from reaching the capital.

The consequence of the repression on people will be serious," Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina warned the government yesterday and called on the marchers to break through the government resistance and come to Paltan Maidan.

Sources said the government obstructions and police clampdown are forcing the opposition line-up to go for a tough agitation programme in retaliation that may include a two-day countrywide hartal this week.

Awami League (AL) President Hasina is likely to announce the 48-hour hartal in her scheduled speech at the post-march rally in Paltan Maidan.

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The 15th anniversary celebration programme also featured a laser show depicting the making of a newspaper, classical dance by cultural troupe Nityanchal, and Pot Gaan, a special folk song accompanied by pictorial presentation of what is being sung.

The Pot Gaan by Rupantar was one of the night's special attractions as its dual effect of audio and visual accentuated the issue of press freedom.

On the occasion of the anniversary, The Daily Star is also bringing out 312 pages of supplements in six instalments, the first one of which -- "Celebrating Bangladesh" -- came out yesterday.

The other supplements are "Trends" to be published on February 7, "Our Cities" on February 10, "Sports" on February 13, "Investment" on February 16, and "Bangladesh and the World" on February 19.

Long march

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which cannot be desirable anyway, it added.

Creating public suffering and destroying public property are against the law of the land and it is the duty of the government to protect public life and property, the press note said.

Again in November last year, ahead of the 14-party's grand rally in Dhaka, the government masterminded a countrywide transport strike to make the gathering as thin as possible.

As of yesterday evening, one of the five streams had already

RU comes to halt

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suggests it was not a killing out of political animosity. We are not ruling out the possibility of the guards committing the murder for money," said a source in the police.

Another police official however said a conflict among teachers of the geology and mining department might have resulted in the murder.

Some sources at RU pointed the finger at the Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.

"Apparently, ultimate benefit of the killing goes to Jamaat and Shibir as Taher had been a stiff roadblock to the wholesale recruitment of Jamaat men as teachers and employees of the university," said a teacher.

Another teacher said the geology and mining department has no teacher with allegiance to Jamaat, which was the case at economics department before the murder of Prof Yunus on December 24, 2004.

"But soon after Yunus murder, four pro-Jamaat teachers joined the ranks at the economics department," he added.

Meanwhile, the campus yesterday mourned for Taher with teachers and students continuing protest against the ghastly crime. Wearing black badges, they held processions and rallies throughout the day. Academic activities in almost all the departments remained suspended during the strike.

Several hundred members of RU Teachers Association (RTUA) took part in a silent procession in the morning. They demanded security and proper investigation into the murder.