

Yunus may sue Telenor

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said the company's Head of Communications Paal Kvalheim. "We have had a good dialogue lately and we had hoped to continue this," he told Reuters.

Telenor reiterated that it still aims to list Grameenphone on the bourse, according to wire services. "The IPO could be this year or next... At the moment, things are a bit unpredictable," Telenor spokesman Dag Melgaard said. He however declined to say how much share Telenor will hold after the IPO.

Pointing out that Telenor has been in charge of the management of GrameenPhone from the beginning, Prof Yunus said the agenda of Telenor is to maximise returns for the benefit of its owners, which is in conflict with the social and non-profit agenda of Grameen Telecom. Yunus went on, "Telenor knew this when we became partners. Telenor knew we expect strict business ethics to apply to any organisation or entity we participate in and that we as a non-profit organisation rely on the statements of our partners."

He pointed out that there are differences between Grameen and Telenor on matters of business ethics and corporate governance.

Referring to the release of pictures by Norwegian state-owned television NRK on September 4 of children aged under 14 building parts for Grameenphone cellphone base-stations in Gazi Engineering in Dhaka, Yunus said, "Grameen and I cannot be identified with this."

"Bangladeshi authorities on two different occasions found that the telephone company was not in compliance with Bangladeshi laws. In total, the company was fined US\$60 million," he said adding that the violation of Bangladeshi laws poses a risk to the company of losing its license as a telephone operator.

He personally has been condemned by the Bangladeshi media for this violation of laws and has been accused of making illegal money the Nobel laureate said.

"The people do not understand that Telenor runs the company and that Grameen Telecom hardly has any effective say in the company operation," he added.

Referring to a police report, he said Malaysia based company DiGi Telecom Ltd, 61 percent of which is owned by Telenor, was accused of money laundering through an account in Singapore.

The police report includes severe information regarding Telenor's involvement in the activities, and states: It can be perceived to the committee members that the majority shareholders of GrameenPhone Ltd are involved in encouraging the illegal VoIP business in the international field," Yunus said in his statement.

The goodwill the name of Grameen provides to the telephone company is being undermined now by these alleged illegal activities, he said.

"The recent activities in Bangladesh leave me with little alternative other than to investi-

Shibir cadre

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Police Station raided the area and caught the miscreants red-handed. They also recovered a pistol from the gang.

AC Wahidul Hoque said Jahangir owned the licensed pistol. He further said police raided different areas of the city yesterday and the day before to nab Jahangir and took positions at Pahartali City Gate and on Karnaphuli Shah Amanat Bridge so that he could not flee from the city.

EC dialogue

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Major political parties have been vehemently opposing the EC's timeframe for applying for registration saying it is difficult for them to meet the conditions required for registration with the EC.

The EC on August 25 announced that political parties must apply for registration with the EC by October 15 to qualify for taking part in the parliamentary polls.

Issues of de-linking political parties from affiliated front organisations, comprised of students, teachers and professionals, and overseas units, holding upazila elections and announcement of parliamentary polls schedule might be raised by the political parties for discussion.

The EC stipulate a number of conditions for registration including having provisions in the party constitution disallowing front organisations or chapters abroad.

Major political parties including the Awami League (AL) and the BNP have refused to sever relations with the affiliated organisations but according to the condition for registration laid down in the Representation of the People Order (RPO) they will have to do so to qualify for registration.

According to the revised RPO, the party constitutions must seek to ensure at least 33 percent women office bearers in committees at every level by 2020, and the organisations must be run according to their constitutions.

The EC plans to wrap up the

gate the possibility of taking legal action to protect the interests of the millions of poor people in Bangladesh who stand behind Grameen and who will be the ultimate beneficiaries if the phone company comes under Bangladeshi ownership and management to become a company with social objectives," Yunus asserted.

The recent row between Yunus and Telenor became a news item for many international news agencies and newspapers over the last two days.

Flood

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terday and about 20,000 people in the district are marooned. The district administration opened up 14 flood shelters in Sirajganj Sadar.

Even though district relief officer Abul Khayer said they released 83 tonnes of rice as relief, visiting different areas the correspondent found out that most of the affected people did not get any relief materials.

Due to strong currents in the Jamuna, many flood-protection embankments and eight levees have become vulnerable to erosion. These may collapse any time, authorities concerned said.

Around 15 metres of a flood-protection embankment on the Jamuna at Talukdarpara of Sariakandi washed away yesterday morning, reports our staff correspondent in Bogra.

About 150 metres of the same embankment gave in to the surging water Wednesday marooning over 3,000 families.

WDB Bogra Circle Superintendent Engineer Sheikh Abdul Momin said they have repaired the 15-metre section and will start repairing the 150-metre section soon.

The homeless took shelter in schools, public institutes and houses of relatives. Army personnel distributed rice and other relief materials to around 300 affected families.

Quoting Department of Agriculture Extension sources, a correspondent in Lalmonirhat reports: Flooding affected about 20,000 farmers and damaged crops on around 1,300 hectares of land. Crops on 720 hectares of land were destroyed.

The damage to crops is estimated around Tk 7 crore. Our staff correspondent in Rajshahi reports: The Padma has left only 25 yards of land between Bangladesh and India at Char Khanpur of Paba. There will be no land there between the two countries if the Padma devours this piece of land.

Members of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at Char Khidirpur border outpost say that the outpost is also likely to be eroded by the Padma.

"The major problem is that the border pillar-164 is at stake as the river is now flowing very close to the border pillar," said a BDR official. Acting Commanding Officer of BDR Battalion 37 Maj Yasin said there will be no land at this border point if the river erodes the 25 yards of land.

Around 2,000 people of Bagha upazila are homeless for over two weeks while hundreds others in the char areas are facing food shortages. So far, 12 people died of snakebites. Two others died in boat capsizing in Rajshahi.

Our correspondent in Satkhira reports: The overall flood situation was improving in nine villages under Gabura union in Shyamnagar upazila as locals were able to reconstruct a collapsed embankment at Khalshibunia on the Kabodak. The embankment collapsed Thursday.

The flooding destroyed 4,495 houses and affected 15,000 people in the area.

registration by October 30 and a few days after that announce the schedule for the general elections tentatively planned to be held in the third week of December.

The political parties will have less than 40 days to complete preparations to meet the conditions for registration. It is less than half the time designated for registration in the EC's electoral roadmap.

Major parties like Awami League (AL), BNP and Jatiya Party argue that they need at least 4-5 months to amend their constitutions to sever ties with the front organisations and elect new committees through national councils.

Most of the political parties have been opposing the registration prerequisites while some went on to accuse the caretaker government of attempting to pull rank on them.

MEETING SCHEDULE
September 7: Communist Party of Bangladesh at 10:30am, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh at 11:30am, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) at 12:30pm and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) at 2:00pm.

September 8: Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at 10:30am, Islami Oikya Jote at 11:30am, Jatiya Party-Manju (JP) at 12:30pm and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh at 2:00pm.

September 9: Krishak Samik Janata League at 10:30am, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rob) at 11:30am, National Awami Party (Mozaffar) at 12:30pm and Bangladesh Awami League at 2:00pm.

AL to press EC

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The party will also demand scrapping of the provisions that introduce no-vote option and disallow political parties having front organisations and chapters abroad.

"No-vote option is not a practical idea. The banning of foreign chapters of a party is unconstitutional and undemocratic," observed the AL presidium member.

The EC should not deprive the Bangladeshi expatriates of their political rights. It is contradictory especially when the commission is registering them (expats) as voters, he added.

AL will ask for the state of emergency to be withdrawn. Otherwise, it believes, the political parties will not be able to hold national councils to prepare for registration.

"We have plans to organise council to amend our [party] constitution to meet the criteria for registration with the commission," said AL central leader Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan.

He said they need complete lifting of the state of emergency to facilitate gathering of around 15,000 councillors.

Factory owners

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emerged as an important industrial belt thanks to infrastructure facilities, positional advantages, skilled workers, etc. ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan, chairman of HP Chemicals Ltd, said in a written statement.

The belt has Tk 35,000 crore in investment and employs about 3 lakh people, he said.

"But production has nosedived due to inadequate gas supply in the past three to four months," he said adding some industrialists have already been forced to suspend production.

Frequent gas disruptions have also caused depreciation of machinery by half, Hayatuzzaman said.

Mentioning that they did not encounter such problems in the past, he said the current troubles might have stemmed from faulty gas management.

"We primarily discussed the problems with local officials of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd and later appealed to its managing director to take immediate measures to solve them," he said.

But as it did not work, he said they on September 1 appealed to the special assistant to the chief adviser on power, energy and mineral resources for immediate solution.

But, nobody has come up with any solution yet, he added.

Anti-graft drive

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should be more transparent. Bangladesh Debate Federation organised the programme at Dhamondi BILLA auditorium.

In reply to a question, Prof Muzaffer said the main achievement of the anti-corruption drive is that people from all walks of life are now more aware of corruption and raising their voices against it.

He said only political parties can start their inner reforms and remove corrupt individuals in their own interest.

Prof Muzaffer, however, added, "We the citizens will be responsible if corrupt candidates win the election." Economist Prof Atiur Rahman told reporters that corruption suspects are getting released because of a lack of organisational preparedness.

"The existing laws should be modernised and honest and talented judges have to be recruited. Otherwise our judicial sector will not improve," he added.

At the programme, lifetime achievement awards were given to Bangladesh Television debate director Nasir Uddin Yusuf Bachchu, Vigarunnisa Noon College Moderator Shameem Jahan Ahsan and the daily Prothom Alo.

Lagoons

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wastes and industrial wastes, said an official of Wasa.

Fish of the lagoons grow eating heavy metals like chromium, cadmium, arsenic, lead, nickel and mercury and they cannot expel these substances, said Prof ABM Faroque of department of pharmaceutical technology of Dhaka University.

"Heavy metals are very harmful for human body and if we eat the fish of the lagoons, the metals enter our bodies and remain there for years," he said.

Heavy metals can stay in human bodies between 8-10 years and sometimes even longer. This can damage the kidneys and cause liver cirrhosis and cancer, he said.

The authorities concerned should kill the fish every three months, he suggested.

Fish cultivation in the lagoons was started by one Pintu, son of a Wasa staffer, in 1985. The practice went on, abetted by a number of influential people in the area, till the end of the four-party alliance government's tenure, said a shopkeeper of the area.

Fish breed in the lagoons naturally now. They are mostly Telapia fish which grow very fast, he said.

Executive Engineer Kamru said it is not possible to kill all the fish in the lagoons; some always survive and start breeding again.

Tarique to stay abroad

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son Tarique. Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said on Thursday that Khaleda Zia will be released through judicial procedures, for which she must file bail prayers in the cases she is facing.

Tarique was freed on Wednesday after getting bail in 13 different cases, 18 months into his arrest by the army-led joint forces on March 7, 2007.

He is still staying in a cabin of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital, where he has been undergoing treatment for ailments.

His close aides said he will visit his mother in a day or two before leaving the country, at the special jail she has been detained in.

He received a new passport on Thursday and a process to obtain visas for England and Germany was on, applications for which will be submitted on Sunday.

Tarique is opting to go to London first but he will not stay there for long. He is expected to fly to Germany from there, where he is expected to stay for a long time, his aides added.

A senior BNP leader said Khaleda, now detained in a makeshift prison on the parliament building premises, also wants her elder son to leave the country quickly for staying abroad during the national poll.

He said soon after release, Khaleda will take initiatives to reunite the party split into factions over 'reform issues' after her arrest a year ago.

"The expulsion order of former secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is also expected to be canceled after her release while room will be created for sidelined reformist leaders in the party," the leader told The Daily Star last night.

Another leader said, Khaleda asked her party's senior leaders to be more accommodative towards the sidelined leaders and not to allow untoward incidents like the one that had taken place at BSMMU Hospital after Tarique's release, where two so called reformist leaders were manhandled by his loyalists.

"It's not Tarique but madam herself will be the leader of the party," the BNP leader said when asked whether Tarique will remain as influential as he was.

BNP vice-president MK Anwar said reunification of the party will not be a problem once Khaleda Zia is released, but declined to say whether the 'reformist leaders' will be accommodated.

Quoting Khaleda, he said Tarique will not have direct involvement in party politics in a bid to keep opportunists at bay. "Things will be different this time around," he added.

Meanwhile, Tarique's wife

Zubaida Rahman yesterday ejected from his hospital cabin a few 'controversial leaders and activists of the party formerly close to Hawa Bhaban', according to witnesses.

Hawa Bhaban used to be known as the alternative power centre during the immediate past tenure of BNP-led four-party alliance government, allegedly from where invisible strings of power used to be pulled.

In addition to reuniting the party, the BNP chairperson will also take initiatives to form an alliance with like minded political parties to counter Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition in the coming days, Anwar added.

SQ Chy, Obaidul

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to verify those.

In reply to a question, the DIG-Prisons said most of the VIP prisoners arrested during the drives by the present caretaker government have been released from jail so far. About 10 VIP prisoners are staying in the BSMMU prison cell at present while about 30 others in jails, he added.

Rab website

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Rab Director General (DG) Hassan Mahmood Khandkar said they are trying to know who's behind it. "We do not know who did it. Until we find it out, we are not sure whether it is done out of fun or a criminal act."

"The hacking incident won't create any security hazard as it is an open website", the Rab DG said, adding: "The motive behind this act is yet to be ascertained. We hope the site will be restored by tomorrow."

Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, additional director general of the elite force, told The Daily Star that someone has hacked the website on Thursday through an unauthorised entry.

"Our IT experts have been trying to find out the origin, the computer which is used for hacking the website, and to detect the person behind it", the additional DG said. "It is not clear to us who did it and why."

Talking to The Daily Star, director of Rab Media Wing Commander SM Abul Kalam Azad said, "We hope that our IT experts will be able to restore the website by tomorrow."

During the access to www.rab.gov.bd, the website read: "Hacked by Shahee, Mirza". The hacker wrote, "You do not know what the cyber security is or how to protect yourself."

Listen, hackers are not criminals. They are 10 times better than your experts. We are genius beyond your imagination."

Rab officials said they have enough expertise in IT and will be able to detect the hacker.

Rubina's agony

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developed the condition during childbirth 16 year ago, due to an underage pregnancy and a lack of appropriate medical attention.

To save Rubina from her step-mother's wrath, her father Bashir Uddin of Piroldanga village in Dhamurhat of Naogaon wedded her off to a farmer when she was only 13.

"During my delivery next year, three village birth attendants tried but failed to bring out the baby," Rubina recalled the incident that had caused her the fistula.

She was later taken to Joypurhat hospital where the childbirth had to be aborted to save Rubina's life, but she was left with the obstetric fistula, a severe medical condition in which a hole develops between the rectum and vagina, or between the bladder and vagina after difficult or obstructed labour resulting from lack of proper medical care during delivery.

"People don't want to give me any job, don't want to see me around," Rubina said, sitting on her bed in the fistula observation room in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where she has been undergoing treatment for four years.

During a visit Wednesday, The Daily Star correspondents saw in the observation room 10 other patients suffering from the same condition.

"A 2003 study by Engender Health, an NGO, found 70,000 women in the country with obstetric fistula," said Dr Sayeba Akther who started the fistula centre in Bangladesh with UNFPA assistance.

Fistula tends to affect the most powerless members of society -- young, poor, illiterate women and girls living in rural areas or urban slums, and is aggravated by poverty, gender discrimination, early marriages, underage pregnancies, and poor health services.

With the National Fistula Centre in DMCH, the rehabilitation training programme has been extended to 10 other medical college hospitals, she said.

Noting that awareness is the best weapon for eradicating obstetric fistula, Dr Sayeba said, "We have to keep in mind that the affected women are suffering due to no fault of their own. They deserve better treatment than what they're getting now."

Gap in wholesale, retail prices

unusual, says FBCCI chief

UNB, Dhaka

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Anisul Huq yesterday asked the administration to remove the unusual gap in prices of essentials between wholesale and kitchen markets in the city.

Anisul, who visited different city markets yesterday, stressed the need for regular monitoring of the kitchen markets by government agencies to keep the prices stable and within the buying capacity of commoners.

"It is not possible for the FBCCI or the media to monitor the prices of essentials regularly. Only the government has such mechanism to carry on regular monitoring," he told reporters after visiting kitchen markets in Gulshan-2 and Mohammadpur.

Anisul said a number of commodities are selling at Karwan Bazar at 20-25 percent higher prices than those at Shyambazar in Old Dhaka. He said the prices of essential commodities in retail markets might remain unchanged compared with last week's prices.

The retailers charge customers 20-25 percent more than the wholesale prices but the profit margin should be around 10-15 percent, he observed.

Asked about prices of soya bean oil, the FBCCI president said the edible oil price has reduced by Tk 20 and is selling between Tk 85 and Tk 87 per kg.

He said the business body would meet importers of soya bean by Sunday to keep food prices within the buying capacity of middle income group.

During the visit, the FBCCI president sought vouchers from retailers. But the traders said that wholesalers of Karwan Bazar did not give them any receipt.

Tk 5.5cr heroin seized in C'nawabganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, C'nawabganj

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel yesterday seized heroin worth Tk 5.5 crore in two separate drives at Balkhar and Poladanga villages under Alatali Union of Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, a BDR team challenged a man at Poladanga village at around 10:00am. The suspected smuggler managed to flee, leaving a bag containing 3.2 kg heroin.

In another drive, the border guards from Hakimpur outpost challenged three people at border village Balkhar at around 1:15am. They, however, managed to flee, abandoning 2.3 kg heroin in a bag.

Liakat

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lakh for information leading to his arrest.

After the caretaker government assumed power in 2001, Liakat fled to India. He was arrested there on November 19, 2002 and freed on bail from Indian jail.

Later, Liakat returned home and was arrested.

Job seekers

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request to send them on staggered schedules.

Another embassy official said the employer and the recruitment agent are swapping blames when it is all about the survival of the workers.

"We will later scrutinise the contractual obligations, the salary structure, and who is to be blamed for the plight of the workers and how to resolve the issue," he said.

Meantime, fresh from a two-day visit to Kuwait, the foreign affairs adviser told reporters that the Kuwaiti authorities assured him that a minimum wage of KD 40 is being fixed for the expatriate workers there and that their living conditions would be improved.

"The question of compensating the deported labourers would be speedily addressed," he said adding that Kuwait will also take stern action against home companies who exploited the Bangladeshis.

The adviser who also heads the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry termed his visit to Kuwait well-timed as an emergency session on September 10 to discuss the crisis with regard to foreign workers.

He said the Kuwaiti government has announced an amnesty till October 15 for illegal workers to leave Kuwait without any legal hassles.

"We've also engaged a Kuwaiti lawyer to look after our workers' interests," he said.

He said he talked with Kuwaiti authorities about supporting a few new projects in Bangladesh including the Padma Bridge, Chittagong Port and the Special Economic Zone in Sylhet.

EU mission

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caretaker government must restore the basic rights suspended by the emergency power rules.

"Words will not be enough, we'll need to see concrete and convincing acts," said a European diplomat.

Before choosing to send observation mission for the ninth parliamentary polls, the EU would like to be sure the political parties are free to campaign and the media to report events. Most importantly, voters are given back their basic rights.

"We will be analysing the situation, principally how and to what extent the emergency is being relaxed," the EU official said, adding that they will take Bangladesh's as a unique case.

The military-backed administration keeps saying it will ease the emergency curbs before the election, but does not specify the extent of relaxation.

A US spokesperson in Dhaka has told The Daily Star that they would deploy observers for the general election despite the emergency rules being in place. They did the same in last month's mayoral polls.

However, US Ambassador James F Moriarty has recently observed that "it would be difficult to have a credible election under the state of emergency."

Sources close to the British high commission said the UK would work under the EU umbrella, and look for 'right practical conditions' for elections.

A UK envoy said they are optimistic that things will fall into place and the present political uncertainty would go away. "A lot can happen between now and December," he added.

Meanwhile, EU officials in both Brussels and Dhaka told The Daily

Star that they will keep a close watch on developments on the ground.

They will wait for actions enough to convince them that basic freedoms are in place at least six to seven weeks leading up to the election.

Otherwise, it will have to restrict itself to assigning a technical assistance team, he continued. "The timing here is crucial."

The EU usually deploys around one and a half months before polls. EU ambassador Stefan Frowein said ideally they would not engage a mission to monitor polls under a state of emergency, but here they might be taking a "more pragmatic approach."

"Even as we try to be practical, we won't compromise on core ideals and principles," he added.

The EU decision to upgrade a technical assistance team to an observation mission for the last parliamentary election in Pakistan after the state of emergency was lifted there gives an idea of its approach to election monitoring.

Aman production

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that he had spent Tk 1,875 for TSP fertiliser for cultivating Aman crop on one hectare of land last season, but this time he has spent about Tk 3,750 for TSP for the same land. Besides, pesticide cost him Tk 200, which is double that of last season.

Another farmer, Badiuzzaman of village Gordaha in the same upazila said he spent about Tk 16,500 for Aman cultivation in more than one hectare of land last season using required fertilisers and other inputs. "But this year I have cultivated Aman paddy on the same land without using TSP and some other necessary inputs, spending Tk 22,500."