

2 more public universities in Jamalpur, Netrakona

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to set up two more public universities in the country to accommodate more students.

Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University would be set up in Jamalpur's Melandah and Sheikh Hasina University in Netrakona.

The decision came at the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair. The meeting approved two laws to this end.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam said the existing Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Fisheries College in Melandah would be upgraded to a science and technology university.

Sheikh Hasina University would be established as per the demand of Netrakona residents, he said, adding that the initial plan was to set up a science and technology university in

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Eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan delivering a speech at "Gyantapash Abdur Razzaq Gunijan Bakritamala" at the Senate Building of Dhaka University yesterday. On his right, Bengal Foundation Chair Abul Khair, and Centre for Policy Dialogue Senior Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya, and on his left, Brac Founder and Chairperson Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, and Razzaq Foundation Director General Ahrar Ahmad.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Build inclusive society to ensure sustainable dev

It will shield nation from usurpers, extremists, says Prof Rehman Sobhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan has called for building an inclusive society to ensure long term sustainable development which in turn will provide the strongest protection against extra-democratic usurpation and "extremist challenges".

He also underscored the need for "democratisation" of both political and economic opportunity to materialise the inclusive society.

Prof Sobhan, chairman of the Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD), was delivering the first lecture of "Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series" at the Senate Building of Dhaka University yesterday.

The title of his lecture was "Bangladesh's Permanent Liberation Struggle: Constructing an Inclusive Democratic Society".

On the upcoming national election, he said all the parties and the voters

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Climate Trust rejoinder

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among the public in general.

"Firstly, BCCT has six thematic areas with major thrust on Adaptation according to the BCCSAP, 2009. Coastal belt and Aila-hit area are primarily the core area where BCCT has funded to combat the adverse effect of climate change. Had TIB carried on such survey in those areas, it might have some very deep insight on the efficacy of such projects. Moreover, it might have enriched BCCT with innovative suggestions. But, unfortunately, TIB focused on projects of local government institutions such as city corporation, district council and municipality which are not that much core or priority area of BCCT and hence it could not reflect the real scenario, achievement and performance of such projects...We find in the TIB report that the study was conducted only on 6 out of 108 projects under LGED and thus allocation for these 108 projects is Tk 353 crore while the allocation to the areas other than these are nearly Tk 2,000 crore."

"The report stresses on political influence, consideration, nepotism or illegal underhand dealing in awarding the contracts but no facts or figures are stated there and such assumptions may negatively impact or belittle such a philanthropic endeavour of the government. It is also assumed that such remarks may truncate the availability of fund from Green Climate Fund and other climate funds which Bangladesh as an innocent victim of climate change badly deserves."

"The report stated on the importance of feasibility study and public participation but with due respect, BCCT would like to add here that both feasibility study and public participation are addressed... In the report, we came to learn that implementing agencies charged Tk 8,000 to 10,000 for the construction of disaster resilient houses. During monitoring of various projects, the issue also came to the knowledge of BCCT and when investigated, it was learnt the dwellers for their own convenience spent that for extension in their houses..."

About awarding contract for implementing any project, the rejoinder said, "After, the project is awarded; the onus then lies with the implementing agencies for the selection of beneficiaries and contractors in strict compliance with the rules and regulations of PPA, 2006 and PPR, 2008."

OUR REPLY
Our news was prepared on the basis of TIB's report.
TIB'S STATEMENT
When his attention was drawn about the rejoinder, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "In our report, we presented our findings only about those projects which we surveyed. We did not generalise it for all other projects."

"Our study was conducted following due processes and methodologies, and we are confident that there was no flaw in our study," he told The Daily Star.
"Before releasing the report, we shared the draft report with the relevant government authorities concerned and incorporated their comments and suggestions, and we are ready for further discussion, if they are agreeable," said the TIB executive director.

3 cops, local men involved

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Contacted, Shahidullah confirmed that the probe report had been submitted to the SC registrar general's office. He, however, refused to disclose the contents of the report.

On December 14 last year, the HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath directed the chief judicial magistrate to conduct an enquiry to find out whether police were involved in setting fire to Santal houses during the eviction drive in Gobindaganj upazila of the district.

In response to a writ petition by three rights bodies, the court asked him to track down those involved in the arson and submit report to it within 15 days.

Later, the HC bench gave more time to the chief judicial magistrate to finish the probe and asked him to submit report by January 31 (today).

The December 14 directive came after different national and global media outlets aired a video content in which a policeman in uniform and a man in a half-sleeve shirt are seen apparently joining another in a pink T-shirt in setting fire to a Santal shanty. The video clip went viral in the social media.

Santals have all along alleged that it was police personnel who had torched their houses. But the district police rejected the allegation and claimed miscreants did it and they are yet to be identified.

During the eviction drive on November 6, three Santals were killed in an ensuing clash with Rangpur Sugar Mills staff and police.

At least 25 people, including nine cops, were injured in the incident.

Several Santal homes were burned down.

In further violation of human rights, police handcuffed three injured Santals who were arrested in a case filed for "attacking police with arrows" during the clash.

Choron Soren, one of 42 people named by police in the case, was shot in the legs. His fellow Santals sent him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital on the night of November 6.

The following morning, he found one of his hands handcuffed to the bed.

Two other handcuffed Santals were receiving treatment at the RMCH and at the National Institute of Ophthalmology in Dhaka.

Their handcuffs were removed following an HC order on November 14.

THE PETITION
Ain o Salish Kendra, Brotee, and Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) filed a writ petition on November 16, seeking HC directives upon the government for ensuring security of lives and property of the Santals.

On December 13, they submitted a supplementary petition to the court, attaching to it copies of media reports on the alleged police involvement in the arson.

In its order, the HC bench on December 14 also directed police to take two Santal men's complaints as first information report and probe those.

Victims Swapan Murmu and Thomas Hembrom filed two separate complaints with Gobindaganj Police Station on November 16 and 26 over the eviction drive.

ALJAZEERA FOOTAGE
In a 2:21-minute Al Jazeera video report, broadcast on December 11 last year, a man in a pink T-shirt is seen trying to set a Santal shanty on fire

right in front of a group of armed policemen.

Later, a policeman in uniform and another man in a half-sleeve shirt and black pants are seen apparently joining the first man in the act. The shanty catches fire.

Although the Al Jazeera report does not mention when the footage was captured, the date is thought to be November 6 when law enforcers evicted Santals from a disputed land of Sahebganj-Bagda sugarcane farm in Gobindaganj.

The clip was later picked by different other media outlets.

Another video that appeared in the social media shows a policeman throwing some liquid apparently at the same shanty before setting it afire.

The Daily Star has learnt from old documents that Santals owned most of the land before the government acquired it in the 50s.

Though the land was acquired for sugarcane farming to produce raw materials for the Rangpur Sugar Mills Ltd at Mohimaganj in Gobindaganj, a portion of it was leased out for cultivating different other crops, flouting an agreement of 1962.

Pick those with no political

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"The search committee has its own modus operandi... The main objective of the views-exchange meeting was to give an idea of what types of persons the countrymen want to see in the Election Commission," TIB Chairperson Sultana Kamal told journalists after the meeting.

"We said [to the panel] that the nation wants to see a commission that can hold a fair election. We proposed picking people who are honest, competent and who can carry out their responsibilities with honesty," she added.

Former chief election commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said, "Those who are party activists should not be included in the commission..."

Only those, who didn't have any political affiliation and didn't enjoy any position in a political party, should be considered for the posts of commissioner, he said.

AK Azad Chowdhury, former vice chancellor of Dhaka University, said, "Our suggestions were that the committee pick honest, patriotic and non-partisan people."

Eminent educationist Prof Abul Kashem Fazlul Haque said the issue of making a law on the EC was discussed at the meeting.

"We said there is still a chance to enact a law. There is no election in near future. There would be no problem even if the posts of commissioner remain vacant for the next one or two months. It would be good if the election commission is constituted after the enactment of the law," he said.

Sujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said that once the names for the posts of commissioner are finalised, those should be made public to get people's opinion on them.

Briefing journalists, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam said the civil society members made valuable suggestions on the possible criteria for picking the right persons for the next EC.

"The majority of them suggested picking non-partisan persons, who are honest, skilled and experienced in field-level administration," he said.

Earlier on January 25, President Abdul Hamid formed the six-member search panel, headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, after holding a

series of talks with 31 political parties over EC formation.

The tenure of the incumbent commission expires next month.

According to the gazette notification published on January 25, the search committee will recommend two names each for the posts of the EC chief and four election commissioners.

Later, the president, on the prime minister's advice, will appoint the EC chief and other commissioners.

This is the first time a search committee on EC formation has held a meeting with civil society members. The previous committee formed in 2012 did not do so.

Shafiqul Alam said the panel would also hold a meeting with five more eminent civil society members on EC formation at the SC Judges' Lounge at 11:00am tomorrow.

The five are Daily Samakal Editor Golam Sarwar, Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud, former chief election commissioner Abu Hena, security expert Maj Gen (ret) Abdur Rashid, and The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam.

Talking to The Daily Star, search committee member Muhammed Sadique said, "We are holding dialogue with the civil society members, as we consider their suggestions important. We are setting precedent so that search committees in future also have discussions with all the stakeholders before making any decision."

AL MEETING
The joint meeting was held at the Gono Bhaban with AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

At the beginning of the meeting, the floor was given to party leaders for opinions on whether the party should propose names to the panel, according to AL sources.

Some AL leaders said that if the AL places names before the panel and those are picked for the posts of commissioner, it might create a controversy.

But other leaders were of the view that if the party doesn't send names, it would mean disrespecting the search committee.

Hasina then asked all her party colleagues to suggest five names each. Later, she collected the names and told them that she would finalise the five names from their suggestions and send

those to the search panel.

BNP-LED ALLIANCE'S STRATEGY
Apart from the BNP, six components of the BNP-led 20-party alliance will separately propose names to the search committee for constituting the next EC.

Several combine leaders said it was highly likely that there would be some common names on the lists of the alliance partners.

The decision of keeping common names on the lists was made at the secretary-general level meeting of the alliance at the BNP's Nayapaltna office yesterday, they said.

Golam Mustafa Bhuiyan, secretary general of Bangladesh NAP, told this newspaper that all the alliance leaders agreed to propose names to the panel.

Earlier, the BNP and its six allies got letters from the panel for proposing names.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League said it would propose only one name for the post of one female election commissioner, not for the other four posts.

The party would put forward the name of ex-additional secretary of the EC Jesmin Tuly for the post, according to a press release.

Explain why

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Article 118 (1) of the constitution says, "There shall be an Election Commission for Bangladesh consisting of 1 [the Chief Election Commissioner and not more than four Election Commissioners] and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (if any) shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the President."

In the petition, Eunus prayed to the court to issue a ruling asking the authorities to explain why they should not be directed to formulate a law for appointing the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners.

He also requested to the HC to declare appointments of all the chief election commissioners and election commissioners illegal, saying that they were appointed without formulating any law.

Schoolboy killed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A schoolboy was stabbed to death in the capital's Jatrabari yesterday. The victim, Ridwan, 11, was a seventh-grader of Narinda High School.

The incident happened around 3:30pm when Al Amin, a local youth, stabbed Ridwan outside his house in Golapbagh area, Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, told The Daily Star.

The victim was rushed to a local hospital and then shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, the OC said.

After the incident, Al Amin went into hiding, the police said, adding that the motive behind the killing could not be known immediately.

Victim's family members alleged that Al Amin demanded money from them when they were constructing a house last year.

As they refused to give him the money, Al Amin killed Ridwan, they suspected.

Police said Al Amin stands accused in several cases.

FEMALE 'PIR' MURDER Police clueless about motive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though a day has passed after the killing of so-called female "pir", police were still clueless about the motive behind the murder.

Police recovered the victim's slit-throat body from her tin-roofed house near the Martyrs' Graveyard in the capital's Mirpur on Sunday.

Masud Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Mirpur division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday that they came to know that there was a gold ring on the victim's finger. They did not get the ring after the murder.

"We are suspecting that someone killed her for the gold ring," he said.

Selimuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Darussalam Police Station, said they were investigating the murder, giving top priority. Victim Nurjahan Begum,

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Sexually abused

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Tempted by the offer, she asked her mother to manage the amount. Her mother collected the money by selling gold jewellery and a piece of land.

Bithi did not have a national ID card and passport. She paid the duo another Tk 10,000 to arrange those.

Raja prepared a fake birth certificate for her and got a new passport with the name "Bithi", showing her as his wife.

Raja along with Topu and Bithi boarded a flight to Malaysia on January 18. The trio travelled on tourist visas.

Reaching there in the early hours of the following day, she was taken to a hotel.

In the evening, she was shifted to a house where she met a foreigner and three Bangladeshi men. She was forced to have sex with them throughout the night.

The next morning, Bithi was moved to another house, where she met three of the trafficking gang -- Brishti, Anwar and Opu. They told her that she was sold to a Chinese man and from then on, she would have to be in sex trade.

Bithi called her mother back home on January 20 and informed her about the danger she was in.

The following day, the three gang members took Bithi to a trip nearby and later booked a hotel room. She was confined to the room and forced to have sex with Anwar and Opu.

"Brishti filmed all these with a camera," Bithi alleged.

Around midnight on January 24, Opu took Brishti to a clinic as she fell sick. Opu wanted to introduce Bithi as her wife at the clinic, but she refused and shouted.

Opu got scared at this and fled the clinic.

Bithi soon took shelter in the toilet of a nearby garage. She then called her husband back home.

Back home, Bithi's family members contacted Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)

on January 23. Officials of the rights organisation subsequently communicated with Harun ur Rashid, a labour rights activist in Malaysia, and sent him copies of Bithi's passport, photo and the contact number.

The following day, Harun traced Bithi and took her to a shelter centre run by "Tenaganita", which works for rights of women, migrants and refugees.

She had been at the shelter home until Sunday.

According to the victim, Raja owns a showroom of electronics goods in Kadamtoli area of Keraniganj.

With her dream shattered, Bithi demanded the government mete out exemplary punishment to her abusers and human traffickers.

Nur Khan, executive director of the ASK, said they will give assistance to the victim if she lodges a case in this connection.

US travel ban could hurt fight against terror Says Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, says President Donald Trump's ban on citizens of seven Muslim countries from entering the US could hurt the global fight against terrorism.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Armanatha Nasir said yesterday that the policy is the sovereign right of the US but Indonesia, which is not one of the directly affected countries, "deeply regrets" it and believes it will have a "negative impact on global efforts to fight terrorism" and the handling of refugees.