

Eight of our institutions usurped

Says Prof Yunus in press briefing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said he and his colleagues were going through a disastrous situation due to an 'unlawful' takeover of offices at the Grameen Telecom Bhaban by a group of outsiders.

"We go through many disastrous situations, but have never seen a disaster in which some people come from outside all of a sudden and say, 'move over'," Prof Yunus told a press conference at the Grameen Telecom Bhaban in the capital.

On the evening of February 12, a group of people, claiming to be affiliated with Grameen Bank, barged into the Grameen Telecom Bhaban, and said the current board of Grameen Bank, appointed seven directors, including chairman, for Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom, two social business ventures established by the Nobel



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Laureate, according to the officials of the organisations.

The group was seen the following days, and the office of Grameen Telecom was found locked yesterday.

The press briefing was delayed by half an hour because a group of men and women kept the entrance to the building blocked until 11:15am. After the individuals, mostly women holding new brooms, arrived there around 9:00am, the area became tense.

Grameen Telecom Bhaban houses 16 non-profit organisations, including the widely recognised social business ventures and Grameen Telecom, which holds a 34.2 percent stake in Bangladesh's biggest telecom operator Grameenphone.

Prof Yunus, who faces multiple cases filed by various agencies including the Anti-corruption Commission, said the people who came to the building claimed that they were there on behalf of Grameen Bank.

"My colleagues say these people are outsiders. A retired army person, who works for consultancy firms, is among them," he added.

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BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir waving to party activists and speaking to reporters after getting out of Keraniganj jail yesterday afternoon. He and party Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, also freed yesterday, were in prison for over three months in cases filed in connection with political violence on October 28 last year.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

New classification of rivers on way

Move aimed at saving waterways

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is set to classify 10,187km of non-classified river aiming to protect them from unplanned structures, including bridges and culverts.

It is also reviewing the vertical and horizontal limits already set for building bridges or other structures in or over the classified waterways.

The BIWTA has prepared a list of 367 river routes to be brought under classification afresh or to be reclassified and determined their standard high-water level (SHWL) and standard low-water level (SLWL) under a study project.

At present, only 5,968km of river on 95 routes are classified, meaning a total of 16,155km of river will be classified or reclassified once the draft rules incorporating the routes get approval.

The BIWTA, with assistance from the Institute of Water Modelling (IWM), is implementing the Tk 18.3 crore project titled "determination of SHWL, SHWL and re-classification of inland waterways in Bangladesh" from October 2021 to March 2024, said Project Director Rakibullah.

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ACTION PLAN

- 367 river routes to get reclassification
- Vertical, horizontal limits on structures on rivers to be reset
- Inland waterways to be slotted into six categories
- BIWTA clearance must for construction on rivers

The development comes at a time when at least 308 rivers in Bangladesh have lost their navigability mainly due to unplanned structures in and over the water bodies.

The last time the river routes were classified was back in 1989. The river routes were classified into four classes based on the loaded draft of the mechanised cargo vessels and the least available depth requirement.

Fakhru, Khasru finally out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury walked out of Keraniganj jail yesterday after languishing behind bar over three months.

The BNP leaders were released a day after they secured bail in a case filed over the vandalism of the chief justice's residence when police and BNP activists clashed during the party's grand rally on October 28 last year.

They were arrested before the January 7 national election.

Hundreds of party activists showered flower petals to welcome them and chanted slogans as they came out of the prison around 3:45pm.

After being released from jail, Fakhru told reporters, "Our peaceful movement will continue. The people of Bangladesh are fighting for the right to vote, for restoration of democracy. We will continue our movement until the people are victorious."

"BNP leaders and activists have no reason to lose heart. The people of Bangladesh will be victorious through the ongoing movement."

"BNP's movement has not suffered any loss. The movement to restore voting rights will continue. It is the government that has suffered a loss by holding the one-sided election on January 7. The BNP has not suffered any loss," he said.

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GDP grows 6.07pc in Jul-Sept quarter

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Bangladesh's economy grew at 6.07 percent in July-September of the current fiscal year, the first time the government has published the quarterly growth figure of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the national statistical agency, released the quarterly GDP data in line with the condition of the International Monetary Fund's \$4.7 billion loan programme.

The first quarter's expansion was, in fact, a decline by 2.69 percentage points from the 8.76 percent growth recorded in July-September of 2022-23. It was 5.16 percent in the first quarter of 2021-22.

The agriculture sector witnessed a growth of 0.84 percent in July-September while it was 2.07 percent in the same period of FY23.

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330 Myanmar nationals sent back

MOKAMMEL SHUVO,
Cox's Bazar

A total of 330 Myanmar nationals who crossed the border and took shelter in Bangladesh to escape the fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army returned to their country yesterday.

They included 302 BGP members, four BGP family members, two army personnel, 18 immigration members, and four civilians.

Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) handed them over to their counterpart in Myanmar, the Border Guard Police (BGP).

The handover started at Inani Navy Jetty in Cox's Bazar around 11:00am.

In the first phase, 165 Myanmar nationals were sent from the jetty to a Myanmar Navy ship stationed in Myanmar waters by a privately owned tourist ship, Karnaphuli Express.

In the second phase, another 165 people were

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A batch of Myanmar nationals, who fled to Bangladesh amid the fighting on the other side of the border, being taken to a ship for repatriation. A total of 330 Myanmar citizens, including 302 members of Border Guard Police, were sent back. The photo was taken at Inani Jetty in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023 Bangladesh down 2 notches

Remains 'hybrid regime'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In 2006 Bangladesh was a flawed democracy and since 2008 Bangladesh government is a hybrid regime, according to the findings of Democracy Index 2023 released yesterday by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Bangladesh slipped down two notches, from 73 to 75, since its previous report was released in 2022.

"Eight of the 10 most populous countries in the world—Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia and the US—are holding nationwide elections in 2024. In half of these, elections are neither free nor fair and many other prerequisites of democracy, such as freedom of speech and association, are absent," says the report.

"Unsurprisingly, elections in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Russia—where opposition forces are subject to state repression—will not bring regime change or more democracy," it adds.

From 2008 onwards, Bangladesh has been classified as a hybrid regime by the index.

Each country is classified by the index as one of four types of regime: "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime" or "authoritarian regime".

The countries are judged based on their electoral process and pluralism in politics, how their government functions, on political participation, political culture, and on the extent of civil liberties.

Bangladesh's lowest score was in the category of civil liberties, followed by political participation. Its highest score was in the category of electoral process.

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