

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



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul 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



"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'."

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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

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

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5



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

EDITOR'S NOTE TO READERS

Dear readers, patrons and well-wishers,

I extend my sincere apologies to you all for appearing before you 10 days after the tragic death of a minor house help in the apartment of our Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque. I was diagnosed with a heart ailment and advised urgent consultation with my cardiologist in New Delhi. I returned 24 hours ago and I am presenting myself before you all to clarify some issues that have arisen in the public mind, especially concerning our stance on the incident that occurred on February 6 in which Preeti Urang, 15, died from a fall from the 8th-floor flat in Mohammadpur. She was from Moulibazar, where her parents are tea garden workers.

At the outset, we express our profoundest sorrow at the tragic, unfortunate and sad demise of Preeti Urang, who came to Dhaka in search of a better life but returned home lifeless. We deeply regret this occurrence and cherish the life of every child in this country and reaffirm our commitment to work for their betterment through our journalism.

Two fundamental questions have risen among a portion of our readers and patrons and in a section of the media, including social media. Firstly, are we using our influence as the leading English daily to interfere, in any way, the investigation process because the accused is the executive editor of this paper? And secondly, are we reporting as objectively as we would normally have done?

We steadfastly support the call by all concerned for justice in Preeti's case and commit to extend our full support in the efforts by the investigating authorities to unearth the truth and take appropriate actions. Syed Ashfaqul Haque and his wife were taken into police

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Fakhrul, Khasru finally out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury walked out of Keraniganj jail yesterday after languishing behind bars 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, Fakhrul 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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5