

## Passing-out parade of 40th BCS police officers suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday suspended the passing-out parade of new police officers from the 40th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), which was scheduled for today.

In a press release, the Chief Adviser's Office said the parade would not be held due to unavoidable reasons.

The parade was all set to take place with Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury visiting Rajshahi on a two-day trip to join the programme at Bangladesh Police Academy in Sarda, among other events.

While speaking to journalists during a visit to Border Guard Bangladesh's Rajshahi Headquarters yesterday, the adviser faced questions related to appointments during the fallen Awami League regime.

Jahangir said police officers appointed during the Awami League rule on party consideration, not on the basis of merit, may face action.

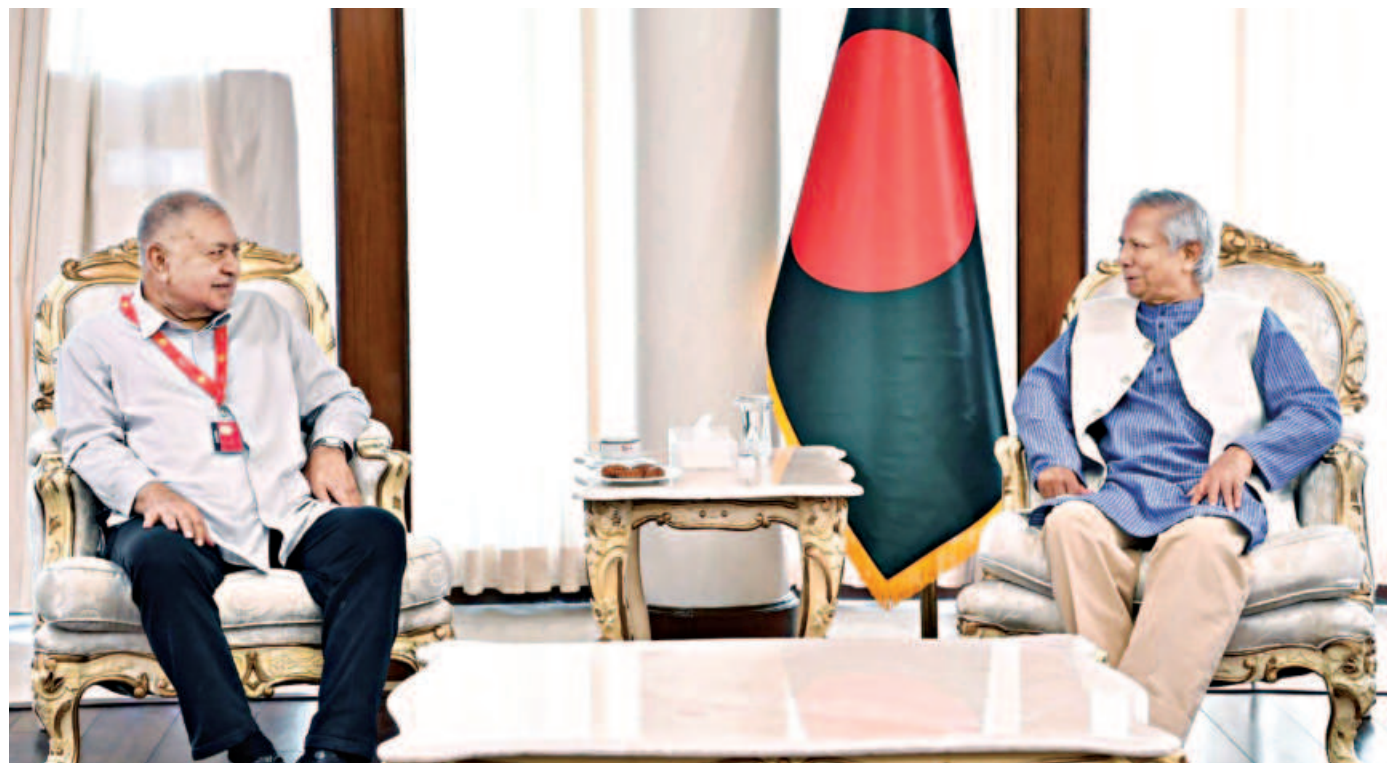
"An investigation is already underway. We have already taken one or two people into custody," the adviser said.

The BNP on Thursday demanded the cancellation of appointments of 2,064 cadre officers from the 43rd BCS exams held during the Awami League's tenure.

It also demanded cancellation of all proceedings related to the 44th, 45th and 46th BCS examinations.

The Public Service Commission recommended the appointment of 71 out of 1,929 officers from the 40th BCS for the police on November 1, 2022, after they had passed the preliminary, written and oral exams held between 2019 and 2021.

The parade would mean the batch of officers was ready to join their respective posts upon completion of a two-year training.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus exchanges views with Gonoforum Emeritus President Dr Kamal Hossain during the party's dialogue with the chief adviser at the state guesthouse Jamuna in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## NYT report on Aynagar details torture of captives

STAR REPORT

The New York Times on Thursday ran a report on the incidents of enforced disappearance that took place during the rule of recently ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Titled "Alone in the Dark: The Nightmare of Bangladesh's Secret Underground Prison", Mujib Mashal and Shayezah Walid's piece for the NYT touches upon the stories of Mir Ahmad Quasem Arman, Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, Maroof Zaman, and Mikel Changma, who were all unlawfully detained and kept in captive facilities known as "Aynagar", or House of Mirrors, by Hasina's security forces.

Mir Ahmad, son of former Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mir Quasem Ali, who was executed in 2016 for crimes against humanity committed during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971, told

NYT about the political circumstances in which he became a victim of enforced disappearance, when he was "under no criminal accusation himself".

The report delved into the situation surrounding his release as well, being "dropped off in a barren field at the edge of Dhaka" following the events of August 5.

Notably, the report described Mir Quasem Ali as an "Islamic activist and business magnate", and quoted his son Mir Ahmad, saying, "I am not proud of his [Mir Quasem] role in '71".

Mir Ahmad added that as his father's lawyer, he believes his father "had not deserved a day in jail, much less hanging". Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, a former army general, described the conditions of his captivity. He recounted how "in the beginning, he would try to catch a bit of sunlight through two small ventilation

openings. But once they found out through the CCTV camera, they closed those off".

The NYT reported that the internment centre focused on prolonging the lives of its captives in a state that was "barely worth living". There were regular and thorough medical checkups, haircuts, and physical torture only occurred during interrogations in the early days.

The report also corroborated the sketches made by three former detainees who made identical drawings of Aynagar. It described the design featuring long corridors with six rooms facing in opposite directions, with toilets at either end, one for standing and another for squatting. The cells featured large exhaust fans to drown out whatever the guards would say, as well as serving as a tool for psychological torture.

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## OHCHR chief Volker Turk to visit Bangladesh this month

UNB, Dhaka



Volker Turk

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh in the last week of October.

"We are working on this," a senior official told UNB.

The UN human rights chief is expected to meet Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and other stakeholders to have broad discussions on rights issues, including the establishment of an office in Dhaka, said the official.

Earlier, he received an official invitation from the chief adviser to conduct an impartial and independent fact-finding mission into human rights violations committed from July 1 to August 15.

The office deployed a fact-finding team to Bangladesh, with a view to reporting on violations and abuses perpetrated during the protests, analysing root causes and making recommendations to advance justice and accountability and for longer-term reforms.

Bangladesh is witnessing a number of visits from the UN for two reasons – new interim government in place and Bangladesh's 50 years of UN membership.

## SUPRESSING MASS UPRISING ICT probe body seeks info from public

BSS, Dhaka

The investigation agency of the International Criminal Tribunal (ICT) yesterday issued a public notice seeking information on the crimes committed to suppress the anti-discrimination student movement in July and August.

The public notice was issued by retired Additional Inspector General of Police Mazharul Haque, coordinator of the investigation agency housed at 87, Comrade Farhad Road in Dhanmondi II/A.

Necessary confidentiality will be maintained in this regard, the notification assured.

The notification called upon people to contact the ICT investigation agency's Dhaka office if they have any information, documents, photographs, audio-video clips, etc related to killings, serious injury, arson, looting, and other crimes to use those as evidence.

Various forces of then government and Awami League-led coalition parties, allied organisations, criminal individuals or groups have committed the crimes during the period from July 1 to August 5, 2024, aimed at suppressing the anti-discrimination student movement, it said.

## Two S Alam sons dodged Tk 75cr

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Appeals Zone Saiful Alam; and Assistant Taxes Commissioner of Chattogram Taxes Zone-2 Aminul Islam, according to their suspension orders seen by The Daily Star.

They were working in Chattogram Taxes Zone-1 in 2020-21 when the incident happened.

The tax intelligence investigation report said the tax officials and some officials of First Security Islami Bank, then controlled by S Alam Group, had "staged a drama" to legalise Tk 500 crore black money.

The National Board of Revenue formed the one-member investigation team on September 20, two days after The Daily Star published a story titled "S Alam Sons: They used fake pay orders even to legalise black money."

Based on the recommendations of the investigation committee, the internal resources department of the finance ministry issued a letter to Bangladesh Bank and the Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate the matter further on October 17.

The investigation report also said the then taxes commissioner Syed Mohammad Abu Daud, chief assistant of taxes circle 22 (Patia) Zamir Ahmed, and taxes inspector Lokman Hossain cannot avoid responsibility.

Several officials of First Security Islami Bank were involved in issuing fake pay orders and manipulating online bank records to legalise the money, the report added.

Citing documents and tax officials, The Daily Star report said that the two S Alam sons were allowed to legalise Tk 500 crore of previously undisclosed money by paying Tk 50 crore, when the actual charge should have been Tk 125 crore. Initially, they also issued two invalid pay orders worth Tk 25 crore each, although that was later rectified.

Shamsuzzaman did not pick up the phone. Instead, a woman identifying herself as his wife told The Daily Star yesterday, "My husband cannot talk now, he is sick."

Saiful Alam denied any involvement, saying although he was in charge of inspecting the range as a substitute at the time, he was absent from work as he had Covid-19.

Aminul Islam said he was innocent and that he was punished unfairly.

Syed Mohammad Abu Daud also insisted on his innocence.

"I had no involvement in the incident. I did not sign any document, and no one told me about the matter then," he said.

## Govt to bar AL from 'political participation'

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the issues of election, reforms, AL's financial crimes and the trial of those who enabled the mass killings in July and August were discussed, said Mahfuz, who was present at the meetings.

At the talks, the chief adviser assured the parties of fair prices of essentials, improvement in law and order and stability in the garment sector.

Also at the briefing, Shaifiquil Alam, press secretary to the chief adviser, said the government is investigating how the AL leaders and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina managed to flee the country.

There was no government from August 5 to 8, and the police were on strike for about a week. As a result, many AL leaders have managed to flee.

"We tried our best to arrest them. We are still trying to arrest those who are in Bangladesh and involved in the genocide."

Asked about the investigation into those who assisted Hasina to flee, he said the probe is ongoing.

About the exclusion of controversial advisers and expansion of the advisory council, Azad Majumder, deputy press secretary, said: "Such proposals have been received from several political parties. The chief adviser carefully listened to the advice of the political parties. He will inform everyone in this regard following certain procedures."

Meanwhile, during their dialogue with Yunus, political parties also pressed the government to hold the next national election very soon after completing the ongoing reform works.

They demanded the interim government control the price hike of essentials and law and order.

Leaders of Gonoforum, Liberal Democratic Party, Jatiya Mukti Council, Jatiya Gonofront, 12 Party Alliance, Ganatantrik Bam Oikya, Nationalist

Democratic Movement (NDM), Bangladesh Labour Party and Bangladesh Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal held talks with Yunus at the state guesthouse Jamuna.

Yunus's series of dialogues with political parties started with a nine-member delegation of the Gonoforum led by the party's Emeritus President Dr Kamal Hossain.

"We want the election to be held very soon after the completion of reforms. But we didn't mention any time frame," said Mostafa Mohsin Montu, chairman of the Gonoforum's coordination team, after the meeting.

If the next national election is held before completion of reforms, things will return to square one, he said.

Montu said they also urged the interim government to take steps to control the price hikes.

Oli Ahmed, president of the Liberal Democratic Party, demanded that the interim government ban the AL for fighting against the country's people in July-August.

"They illegally used the police [against the people]. They killed and injured 1,500 people. Awami League will have to be banned as it "fought a war against the country's 18 crore people," Ahmed told reporters after the meeting.

AL also turned Bangladesh into a hotbed of corruption, he added.

Andaleev Rahman, chairman of Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), said actions should be taken against the AL and its 14 party alliance members.

"Whether the Awami League will be banned through an executive order or an order from the High Court is a different matter, but the process should begin," he said.

Terming the country's current constitution undemocratic, Jatiya Mukti Council Secretary Faizul Hakim demanded the enactment of a new

constitution.

He also said that Hasina should be repatriated from India and put on trial.

"Sitting in India, the Awami League president is hatching conspiracies. This has to be stopped."

He demanded dismantling of market syndicates that are behind the price spirals.

He also called for a ration system in the country, adequate wages in the readymade garment sector and reopening of 25 sugar mills.

The recent statements on Bangabandhu and March 7 by some government high-ups have created controversy and the people did not accept those, said Sharif Nurul Ambia, president of Bangladesh Jasod.

"There is no logic in putting the blame on Bangabandhu for the mistakes of Hasina's former government. So, we think the statements should be corrected," he said.

The advisory council must be reformed before reforms are carried out elsewhere, said Mostafizur Rahman Iran, president of the Labour Party.

The two advisers representing students are doing well, but most of the others have "failed".

"That is why the unsuccessful advisers should be removed from the advisory council."

He also demanded arrests and punishment of the top Jatiya Party leaders for enabling the fascist government.

The AL and its 14 party alliance members and the JP are yet to be invited to the dialogue with Yunus.

On October 5, leaders of the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Left Democratic Alliance and six parties from the Ganatantra Mancha held dialogues with Yunus at the state guesthouse Jamuna.

## Police want to investigate on their own

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to take action, say experts, adding that this increases public confidence in the system.

"We often see news of people's death in police custody. Barring a few instances, police do not face charges when the investigation is done by their colleagues," Jyotirmoy Barua says.

Nur Khan Liton says, "Our experience does not tell us that policemen will impartially probe another policeman. It can probably be possible if the police are free of political influence."

Both Jyotirmoy and Nur recommend forming an independent commission to investigate complaints against police.

In 2007, a draft police ordinance proposed forming a Police Complaint Commission which would be headed by a retired judge of the High Court.

The draft ordinance aimed at freeing police from political influence; making transfers, promotions, and appointments transparent; and ensuring accountability.

The draft never saw the light of day.

In the 15 years of Awami League rule, many police officers acted as though they were activists of the party to get desired posts and promotions. They

used excessive force on opposition and dissenters.

During the mass uprising that led to the fall of the government, many police members opened fire on protests, killing hundreds and leaving many others with life-changing injuries.

Many members of the force could not escape public wrath: protesters killed 44 policemen, burnt down 224 police facilities, and vandalised 236.

After the fall of the government in early August, many police members went on strike, demanding an independent commission to run the police and free it from being controlled by the ruling party.

**OTHER REFORM PROPOSALS**

To closely monitor the activities of cops and take steps accordingly, police's internal oversight mechanism must be consolidated.

There should be a policy on cops' use of force, make arrests, detain suspects, conduct searches, and seize objects.

The proposals also include forming guidelines to make discrimination-free recruitment, promotion, and posting; and incentivise honesty, competence. Currently, the home ministry decides

promotions, postings, and punishment of officers as per the wish of those in power.

Establishing a statutory independent national police commission and amending the Police Act 1861, Police Regulation of Bengal, and regulations of specialised police units were also proposed.

Other proposals include taking steps to prevent sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and unprofessional behaviour towards police women, and ensuring accountability and evaluation of police work through modern performance measuring tools.

Better training on human rights, gender, police activities; special training on crime investigations and supervision; and modern training for specialised units are also proposed.

Reforms should be made to fight transnational and organised crimes, terrorism, narcotics, human trafficking, and financial crimes, and enhance logistics to curb cybercrime.

Besides, eight-hour work days, overtime payment, risk allowance, more hospitals and living quarters are also proposed.

## Constitution should be amended

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"And now, in 2024, we've seen a dummy election. If the 13th amendment had still been in place, we might have had at least a better election," Justice Matin said. Those in power tend to fear election because they see it as a threat to their authority, he added.

The former Appellate Division judge emphasised the necessity of constitutional reforms, and said there is no need to interfere in issues that are already recognised or settled, such as the concept of a "Republic".

"We need to start from the existing framework and address the issues that require reforms, such as fixing the judiciary," he said.

In his speech as the chair of the seminar, Justice (Retd) Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain said the country gained independence with three million martyrs sacrificing their lives for the country's freedom after so much struggle.

"What did we achieve afterwards? Nothing. If the student-people movement had not taken place, we would have still been stuck in the same hole," he said.

He believes that reforms will not be possible unless all stakeholders come together for discussions.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said, "There is a debate now: should we write a new constitution or amend the old one? I believe amending the old one is preferable as it contains valuable principles and reflects our heritage."

"We need to make it more democratic, strengthen people's rights, and prevent any government from monopolising power. That's why amendments are needed."

He proposed reforms such as separating powers between the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature. "The judiciary's powers were undermined, and the legislature acted as a rubber stamp for the ruling party. This must change."

The Daily Star editor also emphasised the need for an independent judiciary, an independent Election Commission, a free press, and the reinstatement of the caretaker government system.

Dhaka University's Law Department Prof Sheikh Hafizur Rahman said those currently advocating for rewriting or drafting a new constitution do not have the authority to do so. He said constitutional amendments are possible.

BIPS Chair CAF Dowlah, and Supreme Court lawyers Uttam Kumar Das and Golam Mostafa also spoke at the event.

## Only CA can announce

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AFM Khalid Hossain said no such issue was discussed at the meeting of the advisory council on Thursday.

"Election will be held when the government will say so," Khalid said at a views exchange meeting with journalists at the conference room of Cox's Bazar Circuit House.

At a Channel I programme titled "Ajker Patrika" on Thursday, Nazrul said the next national election could be arranged by 2025 after completing the pre-election preparations, including the formation of a new Election Commission through a search committee.

"I think realistically, holding the election can be possible by next year," he said.

A search committee will be formed soon to help constitute the new Election Commission, which will then create an accurate voters' list, paving the way for the election.

Nazrul's comments came at a time when several political parties including BNP are seeking a clear-cut timeframe for the 13th general elections.

When a journalist sought his comment over Nazrul's comment, Khalid said: "I joined the cabinet (advisory council) meeting yesterday [Thursday] and no such [polls

timeline] discussion was held at the meeting."

Nazrul then gave a clarification of his comment on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

There is a possibility that the next election may be held in 2025 but there are certain factors.

"I didn't have the opportunity to fully explain these factors during the programme. However, from the government's stance, it is clear that reforms and political consensus are being discussed as prerequisites for the election. These are the factors I was referring to."

Nazrul said that he also mentioned the need for reforms during the programme.

Additionally, he elaborated on other key factors, such as the formation of the search committee and the Election Commission, as well as the preparation of the voter list. If these aspects are properly addressed, an election may indeed take place next year.

"However, I emphasised that this is only my initial assessment. Unfortunately, some media outlets have presented this conditional speculation as an official election announcement. With all due respect, this is not accurate," he wrote.