

Student union polls should get priority over nat’l election

Says info adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government should prioritise student union elections at public universities over any other polls, including national election, said Information Adviser Nahid Islam.

These elections will restore the students’ political rights, and it is the government’s responsibility to ensure this, he said.

The adviser was speaking at a programme, organised by the Bangladesh Journalists’ Welfare Trust, at the capital’s Press Institute Bangladesh on Wednesday.

Nahid said students want to contribute to the country’s progress, and they seek support from political parties in this regard.

“Despite a popular demand for reforms in student politics in universities, political parties have largely overlooked the issue. They always discuss parliamentary polls, but they never talk about elections to student unions. This issue of the

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Army personnel remove a vehicle from the road in the capital’s Kachukhet area yesterday, hours after it was set on fire during a demonstration by garment workers over the closure of a factory. The protesters clashed with the law enforcers, resulting in injuries to several workers.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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Jatiya Party

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fallen fascist the Awami League and its enabler Jatiya Party”.

A shopkeeper in Bijoynagar, requesting anonymity, said when the procession was going past the JP office, some of the men hit the shuttered entrance of the building with sticks.

“Some people then came out of the office and chased them away. The two groups threw brick chunks at each other for a while before the marchers broke in and vandalised and set the ground floor on fire,” he added.

Firefighters rushed to the spot and doused the fire around 7:40pm, said Rashed Bin Khaleed, duty officer at the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Masud Alam, deputy commissioner (Ramna) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said no JP members were hurt.

Around 9:00pm, army teams arrived and they, along with police, jointly took control of the situation, dispersing the crowd, witnesses said.

Earlier in the evening, Hasnat Abdullah, a convener of the student movement against discrimination, alleged that armed JP men were beating up students in the Bijoynagar area.

He wrote on Facebook, “We will march at 8:30 from Raju Sculpture to Bijoynagar. National traitors should be wiped out.”

Sarjis Alam, another student leader, made a similar post on his verified Facebook page at 7:34pm, stating that he was in the procession.

Contacted, JP leader Chunnu said, “The people saw on live TV who carried out the attack. They see the sort of democracy or politics [present] in the country when the office of a political party comes under attack.”

When the JP office was attacked, he said, “Our activists resisted and the attackers fled. They regrouped and set fire to our office after half an hour. They even prevented firefighters from dousing the fire.”

Earlier yesterday, the JP announced that it would hold a rally and march in the capital, demanding the withdrawal of cases filed against its leaders and the rising prices of essentials.

The demonstrations were supposed to take place at 2:00pm in Kakrail. JP Chairman GM Quader would have been the main speaker at the event.

In Mymensingh city, a group of students demonstrated in front of the home of JP leader Rowshan Ershad, denouncing the party, reports our correspondent in the district.

Young men set fire to a tyre in front of Rowshan’s residence and blocked the road for almost half an hour around 9:45pm.

Later, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

The JP will hold a press conference at its Banani office in Dhaka at 11:00am today.

Hamas rejects

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Meetings between Mossad head David Barnea, CIA Director Bill Burns and Qatar’s prime minister in Doha, which concluded on Monday, discussed proposing a “short-term” truce of “less than a month”, the source said on condition of anonymity because of the talks’ sensitivity.

The proposal involves exchanging Israeli hostages for Palestinians in Israeli prisons and increasing aid to Gaza, the source added.

Meanwhile, at least 30 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip yesterday, mostly in the north where one attack hit a hospital, torching medical supplies and disrupting operations, the enclave’s health officials said.

Israel’s military has accused the Palestinian group Hamas of using Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya for military purposes and said “dozens of terrorists” have been hiding there. Health officials and Hamas deny the charge.

Govt decides to lift duties on rice imports

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Alam, on Wednesday where he directed them to take immediate steps for imports.

During the meeting, Yunus, also in charge of the food ministry, asked the secretary to identify potential countries from where the cereal can be imported, the production of those countries, and the prices there.

Masudul told The Daily Star that they would take all necessary steps to ensure the country’s overall food security and would act as soon as possible.

Food ministry officials said they have initiated efforts for both government-to-government (G2G) arrangements and open tenders.

Bangladesh have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Vietnam and Myanmar for rice imports and the deals are valid till 2027, they said.

In addition, the Advisory Committee on Government Purchases recently eased public procurement rules for rice imports through open tender, reducing the required time to 15 days from 42 days.

The Advisory Committee on

Economic Affairs has also decided, in principle, that the government would import 5 lakh tonnes of rice.

The current rice stock is 9.68 lakh tonnes, as per the data of the food ministry.

However, it is assumed that the recent floods caused a production loss of 8.39 lakh tonnes, said the BTTC report citing a report of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

To cushion the blow of high rice prices in the local market, the government has increased rice distribution among people with low income and an increased stock is required for this, food ministry officials said.

The BTTC report said rice prices in the local market have continued to rise despite declining prices in the global market.

As of October 26, rice prices in the global market dropped by 3.71 to 4.15 percent when compared to the prices on the same date the month before. The drop is over 11 percent from a year ago.

In the local market, prices of medium quality and coarse rice

increased by 1.74 to 1.90 percent in a month and 7 to 9 percent in a year.

The BTTC said the price of coarse rice increased more than other varieties –Tk 2 to Tk 5 over a month.

The BTTC report said reducing import duty would encourage the private sector to import more rice and that it would not affect the local rice producers.

The Directorate of Food recommended importing 10 lakh tonnes of rice. Its report said that the government has allocated around Tk 3,000 crore for importing 3.50 lakh tonnes this fiscal year and an additional Tk 6,000 crore would be needed to import another 7.50 lakh tonnes.

A senior finance ministry official told this newspaper, “We will allocate additional funds, if necessary.”

The Directorate of Food report also said that the private sector could be encouraged to import rice.

According to the BTTC, Bangladesh’s annual rice demand is between 3.70 crore to 3.90 crore tonnes. Last year, the country had produced a record 4.06 crore tonnes.

protesters, and several law enforcers were also injured.

He told The Daily Star that the line chief in question allegedly assaulted a worker a few days ago outside the factory and that angry workers had disrupted production for days.

On Wednesday evening, law enforcement agencies held a meeting with the workers, but it ended without a resolution.

Following this, a group of 20-25 workers obstructed shipments, the DC added.

“Although the factory administration terminated the line chief, the workers remained unsatisfied and demanded that the authorities hand him over to them,” he said.

In response, the factory authorities declared the closure, he said.

He added that at least six protesters were detained yesterday.

Meanwhile, an ISPR statement said 335 people have been arrested by the army-led Industrial Security Task Force since August 9 on charges of causing unrest in Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur, and Narayanganj.

The task force conducted 136 operations to rescue factory owners, workers, and management members.

‘DISRESPECTING NAT’L FLAG’

Withdraw case in 72hrs or face tough programme

Sanatan Jagaran Mancha tells govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Bangladesh Sanatan Jagaran Mancha in Chattogram issued a 72-hour ultimatum yesterday for withdrawal of the sedition case filed against 19 Hindus for “disrespecting the national flag”.

Chandan Kumar Dhar, also known as Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, Chattogram divisional organising secretary of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon), is among the accused.

They made the demand at a protest rally near Cheragi Pahar intersection in the port city. Several hundred people from the Hindu community joined the programme.

Addressing the rally, Swatantra Gouranga Das Brahmachari, member of the managing committee of Iskcon Proborttak Shri Krishna Mandir in Chattogram, termed the case false and baseless.

He said it was filed only to harass the Hindu community leaders.

“We will wait 72 hours to see whether the government withdraws the case. If the case is not withdrawn by Monday, we will go for a tougher programme.”

Jewel Aich, coordinator of Sanatan Jagaran Mancha, said, “Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari is the leader of 30 million people of this country, and people of Sanatani community will not accept any harassment or plot against him.”

Heatwave cost

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communities, very young children, pregnant women, and those with underlying health problems are particularly at risk to exposure to high temperatures, found the study.

From 2014 to 2023, infants and adults over 65, who mainly stay indoors during heatwaves, experienced 8.6 and 8.1 heatwave days per year on average.

“In 2023 alone, the same groups were exposed to record highs of 20.9 and 20 heatwave days per year,” the report said.

Besides the heatwave, continued use of fossil fuels and biomass lead to high levels of air pollution, which increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, lung cancer, diabetes, neurological disorders, and adverse pregnancy outcomes, it added.

Air pollution is believed to have caused more than 2.12 lakh deaths in Bangladesh in 2021, the report said, adding that around 40 percent of these deaths were caused by fossil fuel usage. The Lancet Countdown has calculated the monetised value of the premature deaths at \$52.6 billion.

According to Lancet Countdown’s 2020 report, air pollution caused deaths of around 1 lakh people in the country.

The shift in temperature and precipitation associated with climate change is also causing many

infectious diseases, including vector-borne, food-borne, and water-borne ones, the study found.

“Each year from 2019-2023, an average 82 percent of Bangladesh’s land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought,” it added.

Global findings from the 8th annual indicator report by a total of 122 researchers from UN agencies and academic institutions worldwide revealed the alarming new records in health risks associated with climate change. It emphasised the urgent need to redirect financial resources from fossil fuel investments towards health protection.

Marina Romanello, executive director of the Lancet Countdown, stressed the urgent need for action, stating that the ongoing expansion of the fossil fuel use exacerbates health impacts linked to climate change, threatening to undo the limited progress achieved thus far.

The report recommended a transformative approach to global financial systems that prioritises health and reallocates resources from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a zero-emissions future. This transition will promote public health and wellbeing through cleaner air, better diets, and sustainable job opportunities.

AL govt created lawless economy

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“At the end of the day, transparency, competence, balanced development and accountability will face obstacles if politics is not corrected,” said Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The government is working on reforms in various areas and is in discussions with individuals, organisations, communities and parties.

“If relief from current economic problems is not ensured, politics, which is considered as the final determining factor of a state, will also not be able to play the vital role needed for the continuation of reforms.”

Banking, health, energy and information technology sectors suffered from gross anomalies during the tenure of the previous AL government. Politicisation of data also took place during the previous regime, Bhattacharya added.

Corruption took place in the implementation of the mega-projects by the immediate past government, especially in land acquisition for the projects, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of CPD and a member of the committee.

Some projects like the Karnaphuli tunnel do not have much utility as the proposed export processing zone at the Anwara upazila of Chattogram that it was meant to serve is yet to be established.

Similarly, the Padma Bridge railway link does not have much utility but a lot of money has already been spent to implement this project, Rahman said.

He also said it would be possible to get back the funds laundered out of Bangladesh but it is a complex process.

The last government highlighted the narratives of development to legitimise the illegal faulty election of 2014 and an alliance of crony capitalists was formed with a few businessmen, elites, groups, army and private citizens to establish the narrative of development, said Selim Raihan, another member of the committee.

There is no fixed reference period for the white paper committee and it will try to explore the data as much as it needs, said Zahid Hussain, another member of the committee.

The committee will also find out whether data was manipulated or not in different calculations, he said.

The Anti-Corruption Commission did not take any action against the wrongdoers although the auditor general office of the government raised objections in some audit reports, said AK Enamul Haque, dean of the faculty of business and economics at East West University.

“Big projects mean big anomalies,” said M Tamim, another member of the panel, adding that they are trying to find out the procedures of corruption in project allocation.

In political nepotism, gifts were given in the form of universities, banks and power plants.

“The centrality of power reached such a level that the involvement of the prime minister’s office was needed even in small issues,” said Tamim, also a professor at Buet.

Many enterprises are running without even getting proper registrations, said Ferdous Ara Begum, chief executive officer of Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD).

The business environment, private investment, development of small and medium enterprises and inflow of foreign direct investment did not take place at the expected level because of lack of policy support, she said.

The tax GDP ratio decreased when it was supposed to increase, said Mohammad Abu Eusuf, professor at Dhaka University’s department of development studies and a member of the committee.

Data was manipulated to highlight economic development, said Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow at the CPD.

Over the last 15 years, journalists struggled for lack of data and data authenticity as the government was reluctant to share accurate data with the public, said Shawkat Hossain Masum, head of online of Prothom Alo, a Bengali newspaper.

For instance, when inflation was going up, the government stopped publishing of inflation data, he said.

ERF President Mohammad Refayet Ullah Mirdha and ERF General Secretary Abul Kashem also spoke among others.