

Ekushey Boi Mela can't be in Suhrawardy Udyan

Public works ministry says it'll be on Bangla Academy premises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangla Academy has been instructed to organise the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela, the country's largest book festival, at the academy premises only, and not in Suhrawardy Udyan.

The Ministry of Housing and Public Works sent a letter addressing the academy authorities on November 6 with the request.

It said, according to the decision of the meeting held on November 21, 2023, Amar Ekushey Boi Mela 2025 should be organised on the premises of Bangla Academy instead of Suhrawardy Udyan.

The letter was sent from the Administration Department of the ministry, and signed by Deputy Secretary Farida Yeasmin.



Top world leaders meet Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus. *Left*, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo'an. *Top right*, Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar Al Sharif. *Bottom right*, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahiyani.

PHOTOS: PTD



14 RMG factories closed as workers resume protest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

At least 14 readymade garment factories in Gazipur remained closed yesterday over a dispute between authorities and workers over payment of arrears and other benefits, said police.

Of them, five factories are owned by TNZ Group namely -- TNZ Apparels Limited, Basic Clothing Limited, Apparels Plus, Basic Knitwear Limited, and Apparel Art Limited, said Mosharrar Hossain, assistant superintendent of Gazipur Industrial Police.

Demanding arrears, workers of these factories had been protesting on the street since Saturday morning, blocking the Dhaka Mymensingh highway.

Although the workers withdrew from the highway Monday night, the five factories remained closed yesterday, said police and workers.

Meanwhile, workers of two factories--MM Knitwear Ltd and Mamun Knitwear Ltd -- in the Konabari area started work abstinence around noon yesterday, demanding the reinstatement of the workers who were recently sacked.

Workers of Swadhin Garments in the Konabari Zarun area, who have been protesting for the last three days, demanding arrears, took position in

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Red notice

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and was being taken away, when Zakir Hossain, then officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, went close to them and shot him in the chest to ensure his death," he said.

The tribunal has also granted permission to the prosecutors to interrogate Maj Gen (sacked) Ziaul Ahsan, now in jail, for a day.

The three-judge panel of the ICT led by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder gave the permission.

The date of Ziaul's interrogation will not be revealed for security concerns, he said.

"He was involved in numerous murders and enforced disappearances. The ICT probe body has evidence," he said.

Limon files case

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Mazharul Islam, constable Md Abdul Aziz, Nayek Mukhtadir Hossain, and soldiers Prahlad Chanda and Kartik Kumar Biswas. Limon also accused six unnamed individuals of the incident.

Speaking to reporters after filing the complaint, Limon said, "I could not get justice for 13 years during the rule of Sheikh Hasina's government. I have now filed the complaint with the International Crimes Tribunal, hoping that justice will be delivered."

Demanding compensation from the government, he said, "Rab has been accused of numerous human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, killings, and extortion. As I think it is a terrorist organisation, I demand its disbandment."

Limon said he faced difficulties in taking legal actions against those responsible for the 2011 shooting incident during Hasina's rule.

"We faced many obstacles and threats. Tarique Ahmed Siddique, then Rab 8 camp commander Major Rashed, and former NTMC director general Ziaul Ahsan are among those who couldn't be accused."

He also said that his treatment at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation was hampered due to directives by then home minister Sahara Khatun.

His treatment later continued at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital in the capital's Dhammondi, said Limon, adding that he received support from Gonoshasthaya and Bangla daily Prothom Alo for his education.

Taking Limon for an aide of a notorious criminal they were looking for, Rab-8 members from Barishal shot him in Satria village of Jalakathi's Rajapur upazila on March 23, 2011.

Rab had claimed that the shooting took place during a raid to arrest the criminal. Limon, then 16, was picked up and sent to a hospital. The force filed two cases against him the same day.

Four days after the shooting, Limon's left leg had to be amputated below the knee.

His mother filed an attempted murder case with a Jhalakathi court on April 10, 2011.

Limon completed his HSC in 2013, earned a bachelor's degree in law in 2018, and a master's (LLM) degree in 2019.

The government on July 9, 2013, decided to withdraw both the cases against Limon following a request from then National Human Rights Commission chairman Mizanur Rahman.

Limon has been serving as a lecturer in the law department of Gono University in Savar since 2020.

ICT Prosecutor Sultan Mahmud said they have received the complaint.

"The International Crimes Tribunal has the jurisdiction to hold the trial of such cases," he told The Daily Star.

Rab wants to shed its dark past

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Rights activist Nur Khan Liton supports him.

"In my opinion as a rights activist, the force should be dismantled, and I have said this in the past as well," he said.

Liton, also a member of Enforced Disappearance Enquiry Commission, said, "Their [Rab] actions are beyond imagination. After the seven murders in Narayanganj, there should not be any sympathy for them."

The Enforced Disappearance Enquiry Commission was formed on August 28 by the interim government. So far, the Commission received 172 complaints -- the highest against any force -- of enforced disappearance linked to Rab.

As of October 31, the five-member Commission received some 1,600 complaints. Of them, the Commission scrutinised 400 complaints and interviewed 140 people.

The Commission was formed to identify the victims of enforced disappearance by intelligence and law enforcement agencies from January 1, 2010 to August 5, 2024.

Sharing the findings of the Commission with this newspaper, Nur Khan said, "We have found a diary inside a cell operated by the Rab. The cell measures just 3.5 feet by 4 feet... there was no source of light, except a small peephole, and no sanitation system except an open drain, forcing the detainee to perform all basic functions there."

The detainees were able to identify the beginning of a new day when they were provided a piece of bread for breakfast, he said.

"We have found a countdown on

the cell's wall till 180 to 190 days... a feeling for families that reads 'I love my family'. Keeping victims in such unbearable conditions is a serious issue of torture," he added.

According to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, Rab was involved in at least 467 crossfires between 2015 and 2023.

Rab was founded on March 26, 2004, during the BNP government, with members from eight forces, including the police, army, navy and air force.

The force was initially praised for its swift operations against organised crime and militancy.

The force now has 15 battalions across the country, operating under a director general, who is a police officer of additional inspector general rank.

Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, said Rab is not solely responsible for its controversial role, and that it has some positive contributions in maintaining law and order.

"It also depends on how those in the government, who are in charge, have used the force," he told The Daily Star.

He also called for an impartial investigation and subsequent legal actions for any wrongdoing by its members, including for enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

DRAFT LAW

The draft of the new law seeks to ensure accountability of the force in line with the constitution, existing criminal laws and principles of universal human rights.

Political consensus needed

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estate, textiles, transportation, chemicals and fertilisers, plastics, IT, and telecom.

"For instance, the Public Service Commission was supposed to hire government officials based on merit, but it did not do its jobs properly. And the central bank allowed a few to loot public money. That is why institutional reforms are needed to make them functional, independent, and untouchable by political parties."

Mintoo's comments come as the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government formed 10 commissions for reforms in areas of constitution, judiciary, police, election, anti-corruption, and public administration, among others.

He, however, urged the interim government to sit with political parties after getting the reform proposals and come to a consensus on what type of reforms it should initiate and what proposals it should keep for the next elected government.

"Otherwise, reforms may not be sustainable," said Minto, also a vice-chairman of BNP.

The previous caretaker government headed by Fakhruddin Ahmed took up an initiative to reform as many as 189 laws, and the deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina also committed to implementing those.

Only six of those were passed into law, and even then, those were changed so much that they were worse off than before, he said.

"So, if you do something for six months and it is not sustainable, then there is no use for reforms -- it is just a waste of time. What we need is a kind of new social contract between the citizens and the state as well as the politicians."

Scrapping of accreditation

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that the information ministry has the right to review any misuse of the accreditation cards. But such a step of wholesale cancellation without any proof to support specific allegations or evidence of wrongdoing are a threat to press freedom and an obstacle to ensuring a democratic environment, read the statement signed by its President

Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud.

These steps risk fostering a climate of exerting control, including censorship, over the media, which also contradict the main spirit of the July-August uprising, it added.

According to the council, it sees the move as a repetition of the undemocratic practices of the previous authoritarian

Management and supervision of administrative and operational activities, recruitment, posting and discipline in the force will also be regulated by this law, Rab officials said.

The law will also specify statutory powers of preventive measures, arrest of the accused and investigation of offences under the jurisdiction of Rab.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a top Rab official said that in response to the 2021 US sanctions, efforts are already underway to train their members on human rights.

"A counter-intelligence approach is used to prevent Rab members from engaging in unlawful activities. In cases where Rab members are found involved in such activities, appropriate actions are taken through the internal investigation cell," the official added.

Another official of the Rab Headquarters, requesting anonymity, said, "We have taken actions against 4,000 members of the force since its inception for their involvement in different crimes like seven murders in Narayanganj."

Citing their own data, the officials said they arrested 1,460 murder and rape suspects from January 1 to October 31 this year. During the same period, 617 people were arrested for robbery, 680 for mugging, 500 for kidnapping, 248 for cheating and 35 for human trafficking.

Since its inception, Rab arrested some 6,531 murder and rape suspects. Additionally, 3,783 were arrested for robbery, 11,855 for mugging, 5,628 for kidnapping, 7,641 for cheating and 1,802 for human trafficking, according to Rab data.

way the Bangladesh Bank is trying to control prices spike.

Whenever there is inflation, the authorities in general look to contain the money supply.

"But there is another side to it. Once you restrict the money supply, production will drop, demand will drop, and thereby prices will go up," he said, adding that there are 18 factors that influence prices and inflation.

One of them is the inability to open LCs to import raw materials owing to margin requirements by the central bank and shortage of dollars, said Mintoo, also the chairman of National Bank.

"If the factories cannot produce for shortage of raw materials, there will be a shortage of products. If there is a shortage of products, the price will increase."

Except for jute mills, almost all the industrial sectors have to import most of their raw materials to produce goods for domestic and export markets.

In addition, the rising interest rate, which is now almost 16 percent, will increase the financial cost of businesses, and it will ultimately be passed on to consumers.

"So, prices will go up."

The overall growth of the economy may be lower than the four percent projected by the World Bank.

"Consumption has shrunk for two reasons: first, you don't have any money. Secondly, because of the price increase, you cannot buy enough. Inflation has been well above the wage rate growth for nearly three years, and it has affected consumption."

Besides, public expenditure has been reduced, which is clear from the low implementation of the Annual Development Programme.

structure.

Given the circumstances, the Editors' Council has urged the information ministry not to take such wholesale action without specific allegations and proof of wrongdoings. It also called upon the ministry to take steps to stop all kinds of attacks on the media and to ensure independent and democratic journalism.

Access to credit

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accessible to farmers.

Farhana Haque Rahman, senior vice president of Inter Press Service and executive director of IPS Noram, said that currently 550 million small household farmers feed two billion people around the world.

Prof Yunus said farmers can be entrepreneurs if they are given access to credit.

"Every business needs money and investment," he said, adding that a farmer not only grows crops but also sells them to market.

"If he [a farmer] was given access to credit, he could buy crops from other farmers and sell them to improve his life."

The chief adviser said the countries should redesign the banking system by following the Grameen Bank model to make credit accessible to farmers, a considerable number of whom are women.

At an earlier event of the COP29 yesterday, he advocated for Least Developed Countries to get preferential treatment due to their unique circumstances and development needs.

He said most vulnerable countries with limited decarbonisation capacity need adequate financial and technical support to develop green industries, according to the chief adviser's press wing.

"International collaboration is required to foster economic growth and create new job opportunities in emerging markets, supporting a just and inclusive transition," Prof Yunus told the High-Level Climate Club Leaders Meeting, jointly hosted by Germany and Chile.

Today, he will address the Opening Session of the World Leaders Climate Action Summit at the conference.

Yunus said carbon leakage can dilute incentives for innovation in low-carbon technologies globally, as some sectors might prioritise cost over sustainable practices.

To mitigate these risks, he said policies such as carbon border adjustments and international cooperation are essential to balance decarbonisation efforts with economic stability.

"Conversely, these policies can affect the competitiveness of the companies of particularly vulnerable developing countries like Bangladesh, as strong emission policies will cause higher production costs, making them less competitive globally."

He also said many decarbonisation technologies require significant upfront investment. "These high capital costs can be a barrier for industries, particularly in most vulnerable developing countries like Bangladesh, with limited access to financing."

He stressed financial support for

Media should play due role

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confusion among the people, said a press release of the ministry.

"The media will have to play a leading role in preventing such rumours and misinformation."

Mentioning the media's role during the movement against discrimination, he said it should publish the stories of the sacrifices of those who were killed and injured during the movement.

The adviser said the media could not publish facts out of fear during the previous fascist government's rule. But that era of media gagging is over.

He urged journalists to do reports on all misdeeds of the previous government, including enforced disappearances and corruption.

Welcoming any constructive criticism, Nahid said the interim government believes in a free press.

Regarding media reforms, the adviser said the government already formed a commission. The reforms will be based on the commission's report.

The release added that the editors and representatives of the newspapers said there is no government interference

private sector industries of developing countries from developed countries to accelerate innovation and shared learning.

CA MEETS GLOBAL LEADERS

Prof Yunus met at least 20 top world leaders and heads of international agencies, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

President Erdogan invited him to visit Turkey and assured Bangladesh of all possible help in its journey to carry out deep reforms and build a prosperous country.

Yunus also invited the Turkish president to Bangladesh.

He also met UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahiyani and thanked him for releasing the 57 Bangladeshi nationals who were imprisoned for staging protests in solidarity with the students in July.

The chief adviser met and greeted Shehbaz Sharif, prime minister of Pakistan; Mohamed Muizzu, president of the Maldives; Tshering Tobgay, prime minister of Bhutan; and Ramchandra Paudel, president of Nepal.

Yunus has been calling for the revival of the SAARC as a top platform for South Asia's eight countries.

He also met FIFA President Gianni Infantino and invited him to join the youth festival in Bangladesh in January. Infantino accepted an invitation.

Prof Yunus briefed him about the festival and sought his help in bringing reputed women's football teams to Bangladesh.

While calling on Prof Yunus, Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar Al Sharif, said Bangladesh would prosper and grow under the leadership of Yunus.

He invited the Yunus to deliver a speech at the millennium-old institution, saying the Al-Azhar University would announce new fully funded scholarships for Bangladeshi students.

Prof Yunus also invited the Grand Imam to visit Bangladesh and to see for himself the profound changes brought in by the student-led mass uprising.

The chief adviser handed him a copy of the Art of Triumph, the art book on the wall murals and graffiti painted during the revolution.

Among others, Prof Yunus also met the prime minister of Belgium; the president of Ghana; the prime minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the president of Rwanda; the prime minister of Albania; the president of Montenegro; the prime minister of Barbados; the vice presidents of Brazil and Iran; the environment minister of Brazil; the director generals of the International Organization for Migration and World Health Organization; and the chief of International Monetary Fund.

in the media at present.

Emphasising the media's role in establishing good governance, they said fascism could not have emerged in the country if the media had been allowed to play its role over the last 16 years.

They also demanded the formulation of a separate guideline for English newspapers.

Editors and representatives from various newspapers, including Alamgir Mohiuddin of the Naya Diganta, Matior Rahman Chowdhury of the Manab Zamin, Hasan Hafiz of the Kaler Kantho, Shamsul Haque Zahid of the Financial Express, AMM Bahauddin of the Inqilab, Mokarram Hossain of the New Nation, Sajjad Sharif of the Prothom Alo, Golam Mortoza of The Daily Star Bangla, and Mustafa Mamun of the Desh Rupantor, were present at the meeting.

Also in attendance were Mahbuba Farjana, secretary of the information and broadcasting ministry, Abul Kalam Mohammad Shamsuddin, director general of the directorate of film and publications, and Muhammad Abdullah, managing director of the Bangladesh Journalists Welfare Trust.