

'Pope Francis Yunus 3Zero Club' launched in Rome

BSS, Dhaka

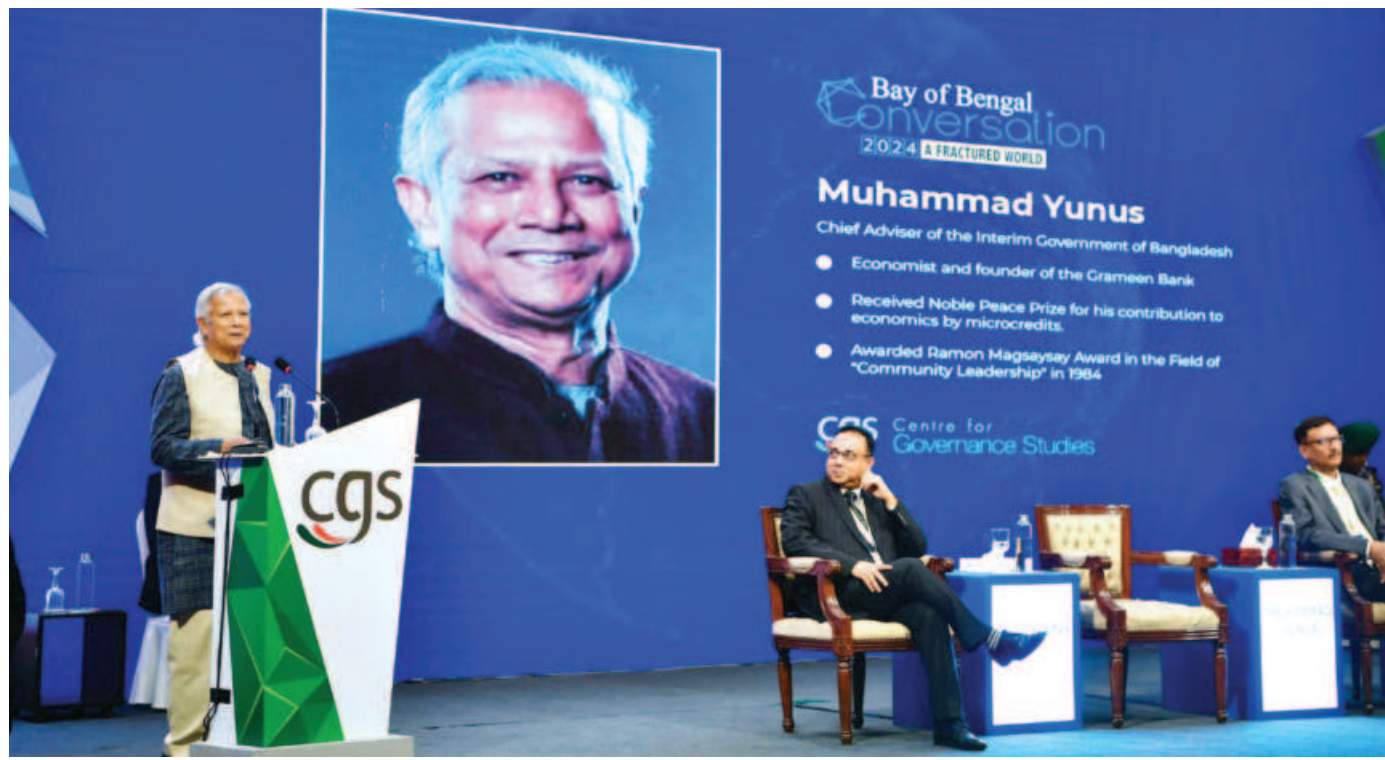
Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church, and Bangladesh Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus have jointly launched a "Pope Francis Yunus 3Zero Club" in Rome in an effort to usher in a transformative and inclusive future for humanity.

The 3Zero Club stands as a beacon of hope for the youth in Rome's marginalised communities, providing a platform to develop innovative ideas and create concrete and sustainable solutions.

In a letter to the Vicar General of Rome, Cardinal Baldo Reina, Prof Yunus, said he was "deeply honoured" by the gesture.

He extended his "heartfelt congratulations" to Cardinal Reina on the occasion, the chief adviser's press wing said yesterday.

"This remarkable initiative embodies the shared vision of His SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus addresses the inaugural session of the Bay of Bengal Conversation 2024. The three-day conference began yesterday at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka.

PHOTO: PID

Magistracy power for army officers for another 60 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has extended the magistracy power given to commissioned officers of the armed forces with the rank of captain, its equivalent, or above by 60 days.

This time the government also extended the magistracy power to officers on deputation in Bangladesh Coast Guard and Border Guard Bangladesh.

The public administration ministry issued a circular in this regard on Friday, citing sections 12 (I) and 17 of The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

An officer with magistracy power can arrest people and put them in custody. In self-defence and extreme need, the officer can open fire, according to the law.

As per section 12 (I) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the government may confer upon any person all or any of the powers conferred on an executive magistrate.

The circular says their jurisdiction for exercising magistracy power will be all over Bangladesh.

As per the circular signed by Senior Assistant Secretary Jeti Pru, commissioned army officers will be able to deal with 64 and other sections of the CrPC.

Section 64 gives an executive or judicial magistrate the power to order an arrest without a warrant when an offence is committed in the magistrate's presence.

Earlier on September 17, the government gave the power of magistracy to commissioned army officers for 60 days.

This civilisation failed us, let's build a new one

FROM PAGE 1

Calling for the creation of a "new civilisation," he said, "This [current] civilisation has failed us. From an environmental perspective alone, it has proven [to be] self-destructive, and from an economical perspective, it has led to extreme wealth concentration."

"We need to create a world of three zeros -- zero net carbon emission, zero wealth concentration -- by introducing social business to solve people's problems, rather than maximising profit -- and zero unemployment by turning young people into entrepreneurs rather than job-seekers, which we do now."

Yunus said the theme -- "A Fractured World" -- deeply resonated with him.

"We live in times marked by challenges and complexities. Whether it's economic disparity, social injustice, or the threat of climate change, we face issues that are overwhelming. And yet, in Bangladesh, we know something about resilience, about facing adversities and creating opportunity from it."

"It's a lesson I personally learned decades ago, while working with villagers -- seeing their courage, and being inspired by their strength. It's those experiences that taught me that every problem has a solution, maybe more than one solution, if we have the patience to peel it out, the courage to try, and the persistence to keep going."

He also urged the international delegates present to walk the streets

of Dhaka and observe the colourful wall murals, painted by young people after the July uprising.

"Anybody watching them cannot but be amazed by the power of the expressions young people came up with, right at the killing fields. There was no designer, there was no central planning, and nobody was funding it."

Meanwhile, former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, one of the world's most seasoned politicians, in his virtual speech said the world is in a state of turmoil, posing the risk of a catastrophic upheaval.

"In some parts of the globe, lives seem to be normal, but we know there is a strong undercurrent threatening to cause a catastrophic upheaval," said Mahathir, who was the Malaysian PM from 1981-2003 and 2018-2020 and was credited for the country's rapid economic development.

He said the ongoing and unresolved Russia-Ukraine conflict and the genocide committed by Israel on Palestinian are both disturbing, adding that the Israeli genocide in Palestine is "blatantly brutal, inhuman and totally unprecedented".

He pointed out that powerful nations in the West -- "the self-proclaimed guardians of democracy, human rights and freedom" -- reveal their fascist and racist nature as well as their hypocrisy as they support Israel's occupation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide in Palestine.

He said Israel is able to conduct their atrocities with impunity

because they are aided by the "so-called great nations of the civilised world".

"Encouraged, Israel is not stopping with Palestine. It has ventured into Lebanon and [is now] now circling around Iran."

While Israel's genocide in Palestine and its attacks on selected Middle Eastern countries are pushing the world to the brink of a wider conflict, the US is busy provoking China into attacking Taiwan, the former Malaysian PM alleged.

He also said Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan was deliberate in terms of increasing "tensions" in the South China sea, adding that the US and the Nato provoked Russia into attacking Ukraine.

"Now, the US will know the military capabilities of Russia. Poor Ukraine will be totally devastated."

He said leaders of nations, the media and the civil societies should speak unequivocally against such provocations and hoped that good sense would prevail, especially among powerful global leaders.

Also speaking virtually, former Bolivian president Jorge Fernando Quiroga Ramirez said the Global South can look at how they can link Latin America, Africa and Asia, and develop their own value-added chains if they find that bigger economies are not open to business.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Touthid Hossain, along with Chairperson of CGS Munira Khan and its Executive Director Zillur Rahman also spoke at the event.

GDP growth figures were falsified by AL govt

FROM PAGE 1

narrative presented for a long time cannot be dissected, it will be difficult to move forward with reform.

The committee was trying to make it clear what type of economy the interim government inherited, he said at the event organised by BRAC University at its campus in Dhaka yesterday.

Bhattacharya provided detailed insights into why the GDP growth, reported as 6-7 percent over the years, was not accurate.

"The private sector investment was only 23 percent of GDP for over 10 years. GDP was growing without private investment. Public investment was only 6 to 8 percent."

On the other hand, GDP was high, but there was no increase in the tax-to-GDP ratio, which remained stuck at 8.9 percent.

"So, where has the money gone? Either it has not been properly collected, or it was totally outside the net, or it was taken out of the country through illicit financial flows."

Whatever money was left was allocated to visible development indicators, creating inter-sectoral imbalance.

Because of this, health, social development, social protection, and human development were neglected.

"Despite being a low-middle-income country, only 1 percent of GDP was allocated to health and 2 percent to education. Even this couldn't be fully utilised. Can you imagine how scandalous this is?"

If the growth figures are not right, it creates problems for total development transformation -- whether it is in the implementation of sustainable development goals, preparations for LDC graduation or moving toward higher middle-income status.

"We are already in the middle-income trap," said Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

He also explained why all of this happened.

"All the structures of the state which are supposed to promote, protect and provide services to the citizens of the country have become corrupted," he said, citing the financial sector as a prime example.

In the country, a strange anti-reform collusion and pro-corruption alliance were built with the participation of certain sections of politicians and bureaucrats.

It must ensure democracy, right to vote

FROM PAGE 12

participation in the local government systems.

"Without these measures, no matter how institutions are restructured, they will not function effectively. The country has witnessed even the Supreme Court being used as a political tool."

"The only way out of this situation is to restore democracy and ensure the supremacy of people's power through voting," he added.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, head of the Election Reform Commission, said the constitution is not just a matter for legal experts but a concern for the people as well.

He said the 15th constitutional amendment has "damaged the constitution", and that is why it must be reviewed.

"Many believe repealing this amendment would bring back the caretaker government system introduced through the 13th constitutional amendment. But such steps require parliamentary action."

He suggested increasing parliamentary seats to 400, with 100 of them reserved for women who would be elected directly, in order to prevent irregularities in candidate selection.

He further recommended strengthening the local government system.

Barrister Debashish Roy, king of Chakma circle, advocated for a constitution that is inclusive, ensuring the representation of all communities, including the indigenous people, and upholds the spirit of secularism.

The so-called narrative of development will be known in the economic history of Bangladesh as the rise of the oligarchs, he said.

The influence of the oligarchs spans banking, energy, the capital market and illicit financial flows.

"If you can't break these oligarchs and their basic power base, no reforms will happen in the country in the near future."

Termining the financial and energy sectors as the lungs of the country, he said both have been looted.

Those who manipulated the financial sector also worked as contractors for mega projects. "They are all part of the same group."

Both oversight and corporate governance functions failed in the banking sector.

The oversight function, which should have been performed by the Bangladesh Bank, was itself compromised: the oligarchs placed their people in the central bank with monthly allowances.

So, economic reforms should start with the central bank.

A nexus of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches has brought the country to this level.

"If you can't repair the country, you can't implement any reforms."

Moving with reforms will be difficult if the interim government can't protect economic stability, Bhattacharya added.

Financial stability is essential as without it, foreign investment will not come, said Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed.

However, the economy has stabilised much after the interim government took charge.

"Many predicted the exchange rate would rise to Tk 180-200 or even Tk 400, as in Sri Lanka. However, it has stabilised at Tk 120. This stability must be maintained."

He expressed concern about the profound damage to the financial sector.

"No one from outside could imagine the extent of the wounds inflicted on the sector."

He went to share a remark from BB Governor Ahsan H Mansur, a former economist of the International Monetary Fund. "He said, in all the countries I've visited, I've never seen irregularities, anarchy and corruption like this."

Ahmed, also a former BB governor, said when he left the central bank in

2009, defaulted loans amounted to Tk 18,000 crore.

"Now, they have risen to Tk 150,000 crore, and according to the IMF, the figure is Tk 250,000 crore. We must overcome these challenges," he said, while adding that there is no need for frustration as the Bangladeshi people possess creativity and resilience.

The government provided Tk 18,000 crore in a single month to honour many cheques, he said, adding that some banks are still struggling to meet depositors' demands.

"Imagine how the banks were looted. We have taken responsibility for safeguarding depositors' money," he said.

There is no reason to be pessimistic about the financial sector as it is gradually being repaired.

About the elevated inflation, he pinned the blame on the intermediaries in the supply chain.

"Yes, middlemen are needed, but some act as extortionists. While it is difficult to reach a consensus in politics, finding common ground for extortion seems surprisingly easy," he said, while stressing that political solutions are necessary here.

He acknowledged that the interim government has restored some order, including in the capital market. "Some pain will have to be endured while making corrections."

He also announced plans to separate the tax policymaking and tax collection wings of the National Board of Revenue.

The government is securing loans totalling \$6-7 billion from international partners, including the World Bank and the IMF.

He criticised the governance of state-owned enterprises, many of which are on the brink of collapse due to mismanagement and a lack of accountability.

"Projects were taken up without feasibility studies and with loans at high-interest rates," he said, highlighting the tax holiday granted to Adani as an example.

Referring to Bangladesh's power purchase agreement with Adani, he said: "Is this even a proper deal?"

He criticised the previous BB governor for selling \$12 billion out of \$42 billion in reserves to artificially maintain a low exchange rate.

"It will take time to correct the wrong policy legacies inherited from the previous government," he added.

Time to mend Indo-Bangla relations

FROM PAGE 1

for Governance Studies at a hotel in the capital.

Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age, said there was no doubt India played a significant role for Bangladesh in 1971, but its projection is such that the Bangladeshis did nothing.

"We need to recognize that we have serious problems. Only then we can resolve them," he said.

The two countries made no progress in water sharing over the last 15 years even though it is a serious ecological and economic issue for Bangladesh. With India not signing the Teesta deal, China came up with a proposal on Teesta management, but India then said it would do it.

"Had India solved it, we would not need to seek Chinese help. We understand China working there is a security concern for India. Then why hadn't India solved it?" he asked.

The meetings of the Joint River Commission over the years were irregular, he said.

Prof Sreeradha Datta of India's OP Jindal Global University said India's track record on water sharing with Bangladesh was not good, and West Bengal's need for irrigation was responsible for it.

However, both countries should

look at ways of addressing the challenges because irrigation is needed on both sides of the border, she said.

Prof Ali Riaz said India blames China for dams on the upstream Brahmaputra and Bangladesh blames India for similar reasons.

"Can we, in that case, think of regional cooperation?" he asked.

The distinguished professor of Illinois State University also asked Indian civil society leaders what they thought about the sheltering of Sheikh Hasina by the Indian government even though she is accused of crimes against humanity.

Two Indian scholars said the Indian government will decide what to do if Dhaka makes requests for her extradition.

Prof Sreeradha agreed that Dhaka rightly expressed concerns over the issue of border killings.

She said Hasina was important for India because she ensured security for India's northeastern state.

"I think the current Bangladesh administration needs to tell the Indian side that it will do the same. That will help resolve the majority of the problems in the relationship," she said.

Shafiqat Munir, research fellow at

the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, said the civil war in Myanmar and the Rohingya crisis were a security concern for India and Bangladesh.

Navine Murshid, associate professor of political science at Colgate University in the US, said Indian leaders' rhetoric about Bangladeshis going to India was part of their politics. "This is highly problematic. We want mutual respect."

Other speakers said populist policies and the use of religion in politics have often caused tension between the countries.

Anil Trigunayat, president of Millennial India International Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture; Fahmida Khatun, executive director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue; Suhasini Haider, diplomatic editor of The Hindu; Smruti S Pattanaik, research fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses; Chakma Circle Chief Raja Debasish Roy; Ashok Sajjanhar, president of Institute of Global Studies, India; Arun K Sahni, former army commander of India also spoke at the event moderated by CGS Senior Research Fellow Prvez Karim Abbasi.

Rohingya crisis

FROM PAGE 12

looks after their own interests. But this has prolonged the Rohingya issue, and there is no light at the end of the tunnel."

Touthid said Bangladesh has not received the expected level of support from its major neighbouring countries regarding resolving the Rohingya crisis.

"During the last eight years, the amount of or the level of support that we expected from our neighbours has not been forthcoming."

Touthid said, "The question may arise: Why has China not been forthcoming in resolving the issue on the side of Bangladesh? Because

Myanmar remains very important for China's access to the Bay of Bengal. Similarly, India thinks that the Kaladan project is important, and for this project, it has to keep good relations with Myanmar."

The Kaladan Road Project connects Kolkata in eastern India with the Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State, Myanmar, via sea.

"I don't see that this is going to be resolved very quickly and very easily. But one thing I just want to mention here is that unless this issue is resolved, it is going to become an issue for the rest of the world," he said.

Highlighting the growing concerns over the future of the Rohingya youth, the adviser said, "Young generations who have no hopes for the future are not likely to sit idle and watch what others do. There will be a point in time they will become a serious problem not only for Bangladesh but also for our neighbours and people from far away."

Since the 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar, widely condemned as ethnic cleansing by the UN, approximately 1.2 million Rohingya refugees have taken shelter in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar camps.