

Settle issues of 1971 to take forward ties

Yunus tells Pakistan PM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has urged Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to settle the issues of 1971 and help Dhaka move forward with its relationship with Islamabad.

“The issues have kept coming again and again. Let’s settle those issues for us to move forward,” Yunus told Sharif during a meeting at a hotel in the Egyptian capital Cairo on the sidelines of the D-8 summit yesterday.

Prof Yunus said it would be nice to resolve things “once and for all for the future generations”, according to the chief adviser’s press wing.

Sharif said the 1974 tripartite agreement involving Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India settled things, “but if there are other outstanding issues”, he would be happy to look at them.

Bangladesh has long been demanding that Pakistan formally apologise to Bangladesh for the genocide committed by the Pakistani military during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh.

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus exchanges greetings with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif yesterday during a meeting with him at a hotel in Cairo on the sidelines of the D-8 summit.

PHOTO: PID

Hasina among 58 sued

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a deliberate and planned attempt to destroy the Armed Forces and the BDR, and prolong Sheikh Hasina’s autocratic regime. The bodies of the victims were burned. Such brutal killings are consistent with crimes against humanity,” said Tasmirul.

Nehreen Ferdousi, wife of late Col Mujibul Hoque, requested all not to call the 2009 incident a mutiny. “It was a killing and part of a

planned conspiracy.”

Advocate Sakib Rahman, son of late Col Quadrat Elahi, shared, “I studied law only to avenge my father’s murder. I will fight against my father’s killers.”

Rakin Ahmed Bhuiyan, son of late Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed, said the 2009 incident was a conspiracy to kill the skilled army officers, destroy the army and BDR, and undermine the country’s sovereignty.

“It pains me deeply to

speak of how they murdered my parents. When I asked an officer if I could see their bodies, he advised me against it, warning that I wouldn’t be able to bear it.

“Why were they killed? They were killed because they loved and defended their country. They were targeted and killed as part of a conspiracy. We demand justice. You cannot fathom how I have been living alone since then.”

A press release issued by

the complainants alleged that Sheikh Hasina identified officers who might stand in the way of her autocratic rule, and planned a massacre to strengthen her grip on power.

The ICT is scrutinising the complaint to assess whether the accusations against the 58 individuals fall under the purview of the International Crimes Tribunal Act, Abdullah Al Noman, a prosecutor of the tribunal, told The Daily Star.

Framed by AL regime

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“All the witnesses lied before the court,” he told The Daily Star.

The Daily Star has found that in at least 12 other violence-related cases, hundreds of BNP leaders and activists were accused and convicted and then those convictions were overturned.

On October 28, 2017, police filed a case accusing 26 leaders and activists of the BNP, and 80 to 90 unidentified people of illegal gathering and assault on law enforcers.

On November 20 last year, a Dhaka court sentenced 25 of the BNP activists to two years in prison. The court delivered the verdict after hearing the testimonies of four cops and a civilian.

One of the convicts, Main Uddin, appealed against the verdict and was acquitted on November 21 this year. BNP Joint Secretary General Habib Un Nabi Khan Soheli was acquitted on November 25 this year in a case filed with Paltan Model Police Station over violence in February 2018.

He was sentenced to two years in prison on December 20 last year, a little over two weeks before the polls. The court delivered the verdict based on five testimonies, all of which were made by police.

Now, the law ministry has taken a step to address the problem – people

accused in criminal cases for their political identities. On December 3, it asked all public prosecutors for lists of political cases filed during the Awami League’s rule from January 6, 2009, to August 5, 2024.

HIGH ACQUITTAL RATE

As per police data between July and September, at least 22,222 cases were resolved across the country. These cases were filed when the AL was in power.

CASES FILED (2009 to Sept 2024)	
Murder	59,823
Theft	1,23,167
Robbery	23,016
Abduction	10,419
Rape	69,938
SOURCE: PHQ	

In these cases, 72 percent of the accused were acquitted.

Legal experts attribute the high acquittal rates to flawed cases, insufficient evidence, and poor investigations.

Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Omar Faruq Faruqi said half the cases in which people got acquitted were political and many people were framed in those.

“The fascist [Awami League] government focused its energy on political cases,

No mention

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The BNP said since the new Election Commission has already been formed, there is no justification for delaying the next general election.

“It is possible to hold the election after completing the election-related reforms. Hence, the people expect a clear statement from the chief adviser on this matter,” said Fakhru.

The chief adviser has delivered five speeches to the nation since the fall of the Awami League government on August 5. Following each speech, the BNP has called for a clear election roadmap with a specific timeline.

Fakhru said although the new EC has already been formed, the BNP does not see any preparations for the general election.

He said the CA in his speech mentioned a possible timeframe for the election, but failed to provide clear details about the election roadmap.

“The chief adviser referred to late 2025 or January 2026 as possible dates for the next general election, but his press secretary later stated that elections might be held in June 2026. These contradictory statements will only cause confusion.

“We are uncertain about which statement is correct. It

does not seem logical and it has left us disappointed.”

Asked whether political parties are prepared for elections, he replied that parties are always ready for elections. “Everything will become clear once the election date is announced.”

Enquired whether the BNP would take any measures against former chief justice ABM Khairul Haque over the scrapping of the caretaker government system,

Fakhru said, “Whenever the right time or opportunity arises, he [Khairul] will be brought to book.”

The party welcomed the recent High Court verdict that scrapped part of the 15th amendment.

“We welcome and appreciate this verdict,” said Fakhru.

BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed also spoke at the press conference.

On Tuesday, the HC scrapped part of the 15th constitutional amendment that abolished the non-party caretaker government system. It also gave some observations.

Fakhru said the HC recognised that the next elected parliament will be the only appropriate forum for amending the constitution.

ACC files case

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the case with ACC’s Chattogram Integrated District Office-1.

On November 23, 2021, that Chaktai branch lent Tk 966.65 crore to Murad Enterprise just six days after the firm opened an account there, according to the complaint.

The bank’s investment committee did not follow the standard investigative procedure, it adds.

Some of the other accused are former Islami Bank directors Selim Uddin, Asim Alam, Kazi Shahidul Alam, and Sirajul Kabir, and former vice president Tanvir Ahmed.

In another development, the ACC yesterday decided to investigate allegations that Awami League General Secretary and former road transport minister Obaidul Quader, Salman F Rahman, and former chairman of the National Board of Revenue Nazibur Rahman, and six others were involved in corruption.

Another case has been filed accusing former minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder of amassing illegal wealth worth Tk 25.35 crore.

At a press briefing at the ACC headquarters in the capital, ACC’s Director General (prevention) Akhtar

Hossain said there were allegations that Quader and former road transport secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri indulged in corruption during procurement of 137 buses.

According to the complaint, a process of purchasing buses for the 20km specialised lane between Dhaka airport and Gazipur stopped because Quader and Nuri wanted to give the contract to a company of their preference. They failed to do it and delayed the entire process.

Former IFIC Bank chairman Salman F Rahman and its managing director

Shah Alam Sarwar face accusations of violating loan approval procedures and enabling embezzlement through fraud.

The loans to Blue Moon Trading Ltd, Exim Business Ltd, Everest Enterprise, Glowing Construction & Engineering Ltd, Vista International Ltd, and Skymark International Ltd amount to Tk 1,907 crore.

Ex-NBR chairman Nazibur is accused of bribery and corruption.

Former lawmaker Elias Uddin Mollah is accused of grabbing 700 acres of government land in Mirpur and amassing illegal wealth.

‘No barriers for those compliant with the law’

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After the discussion, when a journalist asked if AL could participate in the polls, he replied, “Like you, we too are waiting to see. I don’t see any barriers and neither have I observed any deliberate obstacles for them [to participate].”

Stressing the need for an inclusive election, he also said, “Any party that is prepared to contest [the polls] will be able to do so without any barriers. I hope, all parties will participate in the election.”

In his post, Majumdar said the media had misquoted him, “which is undesirable”.

Hours after the dialogue in Rangpur, the Anti-discrimination Students’ Movement in a press release sharply rejected his comments.

Fatema,

spokesperson for the platform, wrote, “The Awami League had unlawfully manipulated the last three elections to hold on to power. Allowing a party that has tarnished Bangladesh’s electoral system to participate in the election is a direct affront to the people’s aspirations ... It would undermine the sacrifices of the July uprising martyrs.”

In the release, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement called on Majumdar to retract his statement and take appropriate measures to prevent the AL from participating in the election.

In his response, Majumdar wrote, “Following the discussions, some local journalists asked me about future polls. I stated that our commission would

propose necessary reforms to electoral laws, rules, and regulations to ensure fair, impartial, and participatory elections.

“Unfortunately, some media outlets have misinterpreted my statement and published misleading news.”

He also wrote that the AL government was ousted on August 5 through a mass uprising that saw immense sacrifice and deaths of many students and others. He said that over the years he too played a role towards that ouster and was harassed in many ways.

Majumdar added that the misinterpretation (of his words) saddened him, and that such propaganda is tantamount to disrespecting the blood of martyrs Abu Saeed and Mir Mugdhoo.

He, however, stated

that the dialogue with the stakeholders in Rangpur was successful.

At that discussion, Majumdar also said, “This election will be festive with the participation of all political parties. No party will face any obstacle.”

Speaking about past polls, he observed the elections under political party-led governments had obstructed the Election Commission from functioning impartially.

He then assured that this time, the election officials would be free from influence and able to conduct a fair, transparent and unbiased election.

Majumdar also mentioned that the Election Reform Commission plans to submit reform proposals to the chief adviser by December 31, after discussions with all political parties and stakeholders.

3 youths try to rob bank

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officials and customers hostage to rob the bank.

Sensing something bad happened inside, the locals locked the gate from the outside and informed law enforcers, they said.

Members of the police, Rab, and army rushed to the spot and started negotiating with the alleged robbers to make them surrender.

The security forces warned that a joint operation would be launched if the suspects refused to comply. After hours-long conversations, the robbers finally surrendered around 5:15pm.

The three robbers were whisked away on a microbus escorted by members

of police and Rab, Rab-10 commanding officer Kahalilur Rahman Hawlader told reporters on the spot around 5:30pm.

No casualties were reported, and the bank authorities will assess the damage, he added.

Matiur Rahman, a resident of an adjacent building, said he and others rushed in front of the bank upon hearing about the robbery, and they locked the gate from outside.

“As we tried to talk to robbers, they brandished their firearms at us and asked us to leave the place. They threatened to open fire otherwise,” he said.

Matiur along with others then stepped back and waited

for the arrival of the law enforcers.

He said the robbers continued threatening to harm the hostages even after the arrival of the police and Rab. However, they appeared to calm down slightly after the army personnel arrived.

After visiting the bank, Ismail Hossain Sheikh, a general manager of Rupali Bank, said the robbers held 10 bank officials, employees, and six customers hostage and demanded Tk 15 lakh for their release.

“The robbers entered the bank posing as customers and immediately seized the phones of all the hostages. They used one of the phones to communicate with the

bank officials for ransom,” he said.

“No bank money was lost. From next Sunday, transactions will continue in this branch of the bank,” said Ismail.

The bank officials and customers who were held hostage by the robbers were safe.

SP Moyeed said Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam gave instructions from the beginning of the incident to end the operation without any casualties. “That’s why I talked to the robbers for a long time.”

“To frighten us, they initially told us they had people outside. But there were none.”

Invest in youth

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the economy of tomorrow,” he said, warning about the risks of governments falling behind of the pace of the time.

“Things often evolve too fast and get difficult for governments to comprehend and also to implement. But we must keep on recalibrating our efforts to match the difficulties,” he said.

He called on the countries to build on their heritage and take advantage of the digital revolution that has been with us for years, including using AI.

On SMEs, Prof Yunus said that most of them thrive within informal economies, but aspire to grow and connect to the global supply chain.

Praising the competitive nature of SMEs, Prof Yunus said, “In the D-8 countries, collectively we possess enough wealth to stand by these SMEs. With our modest support, we can shape a virtuous ‘cycle of good’, for them and for our people. We need to let money flow to them,” he said.

Mentioning Bangladesh’s median age of just 27 years, he said every year, around two and a half million young people enter the labour market.

Pointing to the low skill level of millions of workers in the manufacturing landscape of D-8 nations, Prof Yunus said that artificial intelligence, machine learning, data-

driven tools and applications have come up with a new horizon of opportunities to develop efficiency.

He proposed two specific actions for youth development.

Firstly, building and deepening functional, impact-driven connections between universities and equivalent knowledge institutions and the youth.

Secondly, he proposed thinking deeply about how to skill up millions of young adults in workplaces as well as confronting the challenge of re-skilling millions at different vocational streams, on a continuous basis.

He proposed thinking of a cooperative learning agenda that can complement the national undertakings of the D-8 countries.

Yunus thanked all the member states for supporting Bangladesh during its presidency of the bloc and wished Egypt the best for taking the role.

End brutalities in Palestine, Lebanon
Prof Yunus also called upon the international community to take decisive and collective actions to end the brutalities unleashed by the Israeli forces in Israel and Lebanon.

“We call upon all actors and stakeholders to take decisive and collective actions to end the brutalities,” he said while addressing a special session on the Humanitarian Crisis and Reconstruction Challenges in Gaza and

Lebanon.

“From Cairo, we must voice our unity and unwavering commitment, in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters, at this existential time in their history,” the chief adviser said.

The massacres in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, are clear violations of international law and constitute war crimes. Those responsible must be held accountable, he added.

Urging for the “two-state solution,” he feared further escalation if hostilities in Lebanon continued.

This may destabilise the whole region, impacting global society and polity, not just the economy, he added.

He said Palestine has to emerge as a fully independent state based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“It is not an issue that merely concerns the Muslims. Rather, a universal cause where human dignity is tested. It is about the universal pledge to protect the vulnerable. It is indeed our moral duty to stand by them, resolutely.”

He said more than six million Bangladeshis are living across the Middle East, including in Lebanon and the violence is a threat to their safety and security.

He said beyond humanitarian interventions, it is time to prioritise thinking of the reconstruction of Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon.

Murder case

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and 50 others injured in the clash between the two groups.

Meanwhile, Reza Arif, who is looking after the foreign guests of Saad’s faction, told The Daily Star that around 1,000 supporters of Zubair still occupied the Ijtima ground despite a ban on gatherings in the area after the deadly clash.

Gazipur Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner NM Nasiruddin told The Daily Star that after a meeting at the Home Ministry on Wednesday, it was decided that 500 of Zubair’s followers would stay in the field to protect their goods. Since Saad supporters have no belongings there, they cannot stay there, he added.

Zubair faction’s media coordinator Habibullah Raihan said 300-400 followers were still guarding their belongings, while Saad faction media coordinator Md Sayem called the arrangement discriminatory.

BLAME GAME

Thousands of Muslim devotees congregate during Ijtima every year in the Ijtima Maidan, a large field on the bank of the Turag river in Tongi. The two factions have been organising the Ijtima in two phases over the past few years due to the dispute.

Both factions in separate press conferences in the capital yesterday said that their phase of Ijtima would be held as per the schedule.