

## Yunus urges swift resolution of Korean EPZ land issue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday directed authorities to resolve the land rights issue of the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) by early next month and consolidate all investment promotion agencies under one umbrella to enhance foreign investment in Bangladesh.

The instructions came during a meeting at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka, where Kihak Sung, chairman of Youngone Corporation, along with other prominent foreign investors, discussed investment challenges with the chief adviser.

Kihak Sung, whose South Korean company is the largest exporter from Bangladesh, highlighted several barriers to foreign direct investment (FDI), urging improvements in conditions for large-scale investments.



Each winter, the fields of Lamakaji in Biswanath upazila, Sylhet, transform into a bustling hub for the dried fish trade. Hundreds of traders set up shop for four months, employing local workers to dry the abundant freshwater catch. By the season's end, an impressive Tk 50-60 crore worth of dried fish is produced, attracting buyers from all around the country.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Trump's Pentagon nominee comes under fire at Senate hearing

REUTERS, Washington

President-elect Donald Trump's pick to lead the Pentagon, Pete Hegseth, came under fire during his confirmation hearing yesterday as the top Democrat on the Senate committee accused him of lacking the "character and composure" to lead the US military.

Hegseth, a former Fox News host, is one of the most controversial figures ever nominated to be Secretary of Defense. The 44-year-old has railed against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in the military, questioning whether the top US general has the job because he's Black. Prior to his nomination, Hegseth strongly opposed women in combat roles.

"Mr Hegseth, I do not believe that you are qualified to meet the overwhelming demands of this job," said Senator Jack Reed, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

A number of episodes from Hegseth's past have sparked concern among lawmakers, including a 2017 sexual assault allegation that did not result in charges and which he strongly denies, and accusations of excessive drinking and financial mismanagement at veterans' organizations.

"The challenge of the Secretary of Defense is to remove partisan politics from the military. You propose to inject it. This would be an insult to the men and women who have sworn to uphold their own apolitical duty to the Constitution," Reed said.

## Tk 15,000cr

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tycoon Mohammed Saiful Alam, chairman of S Alam Group, and his family members; Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, former land minister, and his family members; Salman F Rahman, Hasina's former private industry and investment adviser and vice-chairman of Beximco Group; his son Shayan Fazlur Rahman and his wife; Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, founder of Bashundhara Group, and his family members.

Bank accounts of the Awami League's research wing the Centre for Research and Information (CRI) and the CRI's "Young Bangla" project have also been frozen, data showed.

Besides, the owners and founders of Summit Group, Orion Group, Sikder Group, Nassa Group and Nabil Group saw their accounts get frozen.

Among others with their bank accounts frozen after Hasina's fall are SM Parvez Tamal, chairman of NRBC Bank; Mohammed Adnan Imam, former chairman of NRBC Bank's executive committee; ABM Mokammel Hoque Chowdhury, former managing director of Union Bank; Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat, former chairman of Padma Bank; and Nazrul Islam Mazumder, former chairman of Exim Bank.

Among journalists, the bank accounts of Nayeemul Islam Khan, who served as Hasina's press secretary, and Mozammel Haque Babu, former chief executive officer and chief editor of Ekattor TV, were frozen.

"The accounts were frozen before I joined as the head of BFIU," said BFIU chief AFM Shahinul Islam, who was appointed last week. He had earlier worked as the deputy head of BFIU.

If no evidence of suspicious activity or money laundering is found in a frozen account, it will be unfrozen, according to BFIU officials.

The BFIU is investigating various irregularities, such as money laundering, loan fraud, and embezzlement of government and depositors' funds, by more than a dozen business groups.

It has already sent investigation reports on S Alam Group, Beximco Group and family members of former land minister Saifuzzaman to the CID and ACC for legal action.

The BFIU has also requested various countries, including Singapore, the US and the UK, to provide specific information on money laundering by half a dozen business groups.

## Polls by August

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Certain formalities are required for the election, such as updating the voter list. If anyone wishes to update it, it can be done within a month.

"Tasks like appointing presiding officers shouldn't take more than one or two months. Everything is already prepared."

The Election Commission has stated that they are ready to hold the elections and are prepared to conduct the polls, Fakhrul said.

They have also made it clear that conducting two elections simultaneously is not feasible.

"Therefore, in the interest of the nation, holding the parliamentary election is essential. If you want to put the country back on track, there is no alternative to an election."

Asked about the proclamation of the 'Uprising of 2024,' Fakhrul said the party received a draft prepared by adviser Mahfuj Alam requesting feedback.

"The issue is so sensitive and significant that it cannot be addressed with a single day's notice. We have discussed it within the party and will discuss it further. It is also necessary to consult with other political parties on this matter. Moreover, discussions with constitutional experts are essential, as there are numerous constitutional aspects that we need to examine."

## Muggings keep rising amid special measures

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intelligence report to increase vigilance, people continued to lose valuables, money, and sometimes, their lives in mugging incidents.

On December 15, Mohammad Habibullah, 18, an employee of a clothing shop in Islampur, was fatally stabbed by muggers in Moghbazar.

The incident occurred around 5:45am when he was walking home upon his return from his ancestral home in Mymensingh.

Md Razu, officer-in-charge of Hatirheel Police Station, said they were conducting drives to arrest the culprit, but could not identify anyone yet.

Police sources identified Jatrabari, Sayedabad, and Mirhazirbagh as high-risk mugging spots, where drug addict muggers often target people for their mobile phones.

For instance, on December 18, around 8:30pm, cloth trader Kamrul Hasan, 23, was fatally stabbed by muggers in Sayedabad.

Faruk Ahammad, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, said they arrested three suspects over the incident.

In confessional statements, the suspects admitted to stabbing Kamrul after he had refused to hand his mobile phone, Faruk said.

"We are conducting special drives in mugging hotspots. In December alone, we arrested 45 muggers. And in the first ten days of January, we have apprehended 25 more, including 10 top-listed muggers," he added.

## Govt to sit with parties tomorrow

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Shrmeen, spokesperson of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, said, "The government has taken a long time to take any visible steps. We are not taking it cordially."

Since the government scheduled a meeting on Thursday and stated that a date will be announced there, she said, "We hope they will not break their promise this time."

Asked about their next step, Samanta said, "As our various leaders and activists are engaged in different areas to carry out programmes, we have not yet had the opportunity to hold discussions among ourselves. We will hold discussions tomorrow [Thursday] and announce our next course of action."

Meanwhile, at the Foreign Service Academy, Mahfuj said the Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement was supposed to announce the proclamation, but later the government said that it would take the initiative to prepare the proclamation after consulting with all relevant parties.

"Over the past two weeks or so, we, from the advisory council, have tried to prepare a draft of the proclamation based on the students' recommendations. We have also attempted to engage with various stakeholders, including political parties, to gather opinions. However, we have not been able to communicate with everyone."

## Tulip resigns as UK minister

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Tulip was under pressure over her occupancy of the properties, including a two-bedroom flat near King's Cross in central London and a separate home in Hampstead.

Besides, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission has launched multiple probes into the alleged corruption of Hasina and her family members, including Tulip.

Tulip is one of those named in the commission's investigation into accusations of embezzlement of \$5 billion connected to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi money laundering investigators have since ordered the country's big banks to hand over details of transactions relating to Tulip as part of the probe.

In her letter of resignation, Tulip said

HUNDREDS OF MUGGERS

On January 2, at around 6:00am, private company employee Kajal Ahmed, 44, and three of his relatives were returning to their Khilgaon home in an auto-rickshaw from another relative's house in Ray Shaheb Bazar.

As they reached Adarsha Lane in Khilgaon, three individuals on a motorbike stopped the auto-rickshaw and asked them to hand their mobile phones and money. When Kajal delayed handing over the items, the muggers stabbed his left thigh and fled with two mobile phones and Tk 5,000 in cash.

"We filed a case with Khilgaon Police Station after the incident, but police have yet to recover the phones and the cash, or arrest anyone," said Nazmun Nahar Tonny, Kajal's niece.

Khilgaon is under DMP's Moitijheel Division, where, along with Wari Division, at least 212 muggers are active, according to the recent intelligence report on mugging.

Some 386 muggers are active in the Mirpur and Tejgaon divisions, 217 in Ramna and Lalbagh, and 154 in Uttara and Gulshan.

According to sources in the police, those actively involved in mugging in Uttara, Abdullahpur, and Airport areas include people from Tongi and Ashulia. Locals said mugging occurs every night on the busy road from Tongi Bridge to the airport. Sometimes in broad daylight, muggers swiftly take away valuables, including mobile phones or gold earrings, from passengers of

private cars and buses.

SN Md Nazrul Islam, additional commissioner (crime and operations) of DMP, confirmed that a list of mugging spots and muggers was prepared.

"We have deployed officers in uniforms and plain clothes at these spots to prevent mugging incidents. Along with this, we are conducting a drive to arrest the listed muggers," he added.

HOTSPOT MOHAMMADPUR

The list highlighted that the Mohammadpur area is the most affected by muggers.

In the areas under Mohammadpur Police Station, 205 people are actively involved in mugging, according to the list. There are multiple cases against each of them.

Mohammadpur also has the highest number of 108 mugging spots.

Mohammad Ibne Mizan, deputy commissioner of DMP's Tejgaon Division, told The Daily Star, "A huge number of homeless people live and work in Mohammadpur as the area is close to the river, and the Beribadh (dam).

"Besides, anyone can easily flee the area to Gabtoli, Old Dhaka, and Keraniganj by using the Beribadh after committing a crime.

"As a list has been prepared based on last year's crime data, police will now be able to increase vigilance and patrolling following the list, and also create awareness among people," he added.

and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee declared that they would announce the proclamation of the July uprising at the Central Shaheed Minar on December 31.

This move sparked various discussions in political circles, with many questioning the timing and potential impact of the declaration.

However, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said on December 30 night that the interim government had taken the initiative to announce the proclamation based on national consensus.

Following this development, the two platforms said they would not announce the proclamation but hold a programme titled "March for Unity" at the Shaheed Minar on December 31.

From the rally, the student leaders gave the government a deadline of January 15 to announce the proclamation.

On January 4, the leaders of the students' and citizens' platforms announced that they would conduct mass contact campaign as part of observing their "Declaration Week," from January 6 to 11. Later, they extended their programme till January 14.

On January 9, during a press briefing, Mahfuj said the interim government will not formulate the July Proclamation but will facilitate the process for creating a consensus among political parties and stakeholders on the draft prepared by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement.

businessmen.

The flat was eventually transferred as a gift to a Bangladeshi lawyer with links to Hasina, her family and her ousted government, according to the newspaper.

It also reported Tulip and her family were given or used several other London properties bought by members or associates of the Awami League party.

Hours after Tulip's resignation, a statement from Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser's Press Wing said Dhaka is committed to bringing back stolen money from around the world.

As Professor Yunus told The Sunday Times of London, Tulip may not have entirely understood the source of the money and property that she was enjoying in London, but she knows now and should seek forgiveness from the people of Bangladesh, it said.

## No legal bar to Babar's release

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Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Nasreen Akter also declared abetted (ended) the appeals of other three accused as they died.

There is no legal bar for Babar to get released from Keraniganj jail following the HC verdict, his lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told The Daily Star immediately after receiving the judgement.

"The judges of the High Court bench said they will sign an advance order today [Tuesday]. I hope that this order will be delivered today and Lutfozzaman Babar will be freed from Keraniganj jail as soon as possible," the lawyer added.

A group of followers of Babar instantly brought out a brief procession on the Supreme Court premises and chanted slogans expressing satisfaction over his acquittal.

Two cases were lodged with Karnaphuli Police Station a day after the arms were seized at Chatotgram Urea Fertiliser Ltd (CUFL) jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004, during the rule of BNP-Jamaat government.

The arms and ammunition included 4,930 sophisticated firearms, 840 rocket launchers, 300 rockets, 27,020 grenades, 2,000 grenade-launching tubes, 6,392 magazines, and 11.41 million bullets.

One case was filed under the Special Powers Act 1974 for smuggling of firearms and the other under the Arms Act for illegal possession of arms.

Yesterday, the HC bench led by Justice Mustafa delivered the verdict on the appeals in connection with the case filed under the Arms Act.

On December 18 last year, the same HC bench made a judgement on the appeals in connection with the case lodged under the Special Powers Act.

The court on that day acquitted Babar and five others, who were sentenced to death by the trial court, in the case.

The other five who were cleared from the arms case yesterday are

former industries minister and then Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami Matiur Rahman Nizami; former director of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) Maj Gen (ret'd) Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury; ex-CUFL managing director Mohsin Talukder; former CUFL general manager (admin) KM Enamul Hoque; and former additional secretary of industries ministry Nurul Amin.

The HC also declared the appeals of three accused abetted (ended) as they died. They are former NSI DG Brig Gen (ret'd) Md Abdur Rahim, labour supplier Deen Mohammad, and trawler owner Haji Sobhan.

In May 2016, Nizami was executed for crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

The jail sentences of five accused, including Paresh Barua, out of 14 who were given life sentences by the trial court, were commuted by the HC yesterday.

Paresh's imprisonment was commuted to 14 years.

The four others, whose jail sentences were commuted to 10 years, are former NSI director wing commander (ret'd) Shahab Uddin, former NSI deputy director Maj (ret'd) Liakat Hossain, ex-NSI field officer Akbar Hossain Khan, and Hafizur Rahman.

A section of lawyers, including SM Shahjahan, Mohammad Shishir Monir, Shadhan Kumar Banik and Mohammad Ahsan, appeared for the accused while Deputy Attorney General Sultana Akhter Rubi and Assistant Attorney General Md Asif Imran Zisan represented the state during yesterday's hearing.

HC OBSERVATIONS

Delivering the verdict, the HC bench observed that the prosecution could not prove the charges brought against all accused regarding actual control and possession of the firearms.

The conviction and sentence in criminal cases cannot be handed out without credible evidence, it said.

## 480 SIs join service

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He said a four-member delegation of the dismissed SIs met the senior secretary of the home ministry's Public Security Division on Monday.

"Although he had previously assured us of verifying and considering our demands by January 12, we didn't receive a positive response from him during yesterday's [Monday's] meeting. As a result, we've begun a fast-unto-death programme," Prabir told The Daily Star.

They spent that entire night in front of the Secretariat and vowed to continue their protest until their jobs are reinstated.

Earlier, on January 5 and 6, the dismissed SIs held a sit-in at the same location. They temporarily called off their demonstrations on January 6 after being assured by the secretary that their demands would be considered.

On October 21 last year, 252 trainee sub-inspectors (SIs) were dismissed just a month before graduating from the police academy for "breach of discipline" during a break in a practice session for the closing parade of the 40th BCS (Police) Probationers Batch.

An additional 58 cadets from the same batch were dismissed on November 4, followed by 11 more later.

Sources said the Police Headquarters, in consultation with the home ministry, conducted a background check on the political affiliations of 811 trainees in the batch after the fall of the Awami League government on August 5.

A number of dismissed SIs claimed the allegations against them were baseless and their dismissal was an act of severe injustice. They expressed frustrations over the situation, saying that they and their families are struggling financially.

Meanwhile, no decision has yet been taken regarding the passing out of the 62 trainee ASPs of the 40th BCS and three of the 38th BCS (police) batches from the academy, halting the training of the officers of 41st and 43rd BCS (police) batch officers.

Police officials believe the long delay will create a vacuum of officers in the field level, with the law enforcement agency already in disarray since the fall of the AL government.

On October 20, 66 officers were scheduled to pass out from the academy. Twenty-five of them were accused of "walking in a disorderly manner" during their training session and served show-cause notices on December 15.