

BNP drafts July uprising declaration Says it's in talks with parties to ensure broader acceptance of proclamation

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The BNP has finalised its draft declaration of the July uprising. It is currently discussing the draft with allies and like-minded parties for their feedback to ensure broader acceptance.

The party would interact with the advisers of the concerned ministries later and the declaration would take a final shape after reaching a greater consensus, BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star.

The draft was made as per the discussion in a meeting held with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and other political parties on January 16, he said.

"I believe the declaration should bear signatures of all parties concerned, as it carries political and historical significance. The process is ongoing, and we, all stakeholders, need to have patience," he added.

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Some of the bodies that washed up ashore in Libya. They are feared to be of Bangladeshis who tried to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe from Libya.

PHOTO: EMBASSY OF BANGLADESH IN LIBYA

1,500 videos, photos of July atrocities collected

Says joint initiative of 2 non-profits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Protest Archive, a digital platform that has been collecting videos, audio recordings, and photos documenting the state-led atrocities, including police brutality, perpetrated during the July uprising last year, announced its official launch yesterday.

Two non-profit organisations—Activate Rights, which advocates digital rights among youth in Bangladesh, and Witness, an international organisation that helps human rights defenders use video to expose injustice—are jointly collaborating on the initiative.

The launching ceremony was organised at DrikPath Bhubon in the capital's Panthapath yesterday.

Bangladesh Protest Archive aims to use digital evidence of the gross human rights violations during the July uprising to pursue justice through formal channels in Bangladesh and internationally.

It has so far collected around 1,500 videos and photos from open sources, including social media, as well as from journalists and the public.

The platform also allows independent users to contribute to the archive by uploading media recorded personally or media recorded by trusted sources to its website (bangladeshprotestarchive.com).

Prominent photographer Shahidul Alam, Dhaka-based fact-checkers Qadaruddin Shishir and Minhaj Aman, researcher Altaf Parvez, and human rights defender Mustain Billah, also a member of the interim government's Constitutional Reform Commission, spoke at yesterday's event.

Govt officials may be able to retire after 15yrs

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But if an employee does something wrong, the authorities can launch departmental procedure and force them to retire. "But such retirement should not be forced under the pretext of public interest."

The option of voluntary retirement after 15 years is an opportunity for some. A joint secretary who worked at the Prime Minister's Office when the Awami league was in power, said, "I have lost the enthusiasm for work. I got the job by obtaining brilliant results. I worked in important positions because of my ability to work well. But now I am labelled as a fascist collaborator. If they implement the recommendations, I will retire and leave the country."

Another source in the commission

said the recommendations were not designed to give advantage to a particular group.

"In the past, recommendations of various commissions were rejected. As this commission was formed after a mass uprising, we hope the government will implement its recommendations.

"We strongly recommend stopping the current practice of giving promotions to more officers than there are posts. Those who do not get promotions will have the opportunity to leave the service after 15 years and move on."

The commission may propose reducing the time an officer gets to provide information sought under the Right to Information Act. It may also propose increasing the penalties

under the act.

Public administration researcher and former secretary AKM Abdul Awal Majumder said, "In the armed forces, there is an opportunity for retirement after 15 years. Most officers cannot advance further after a major promotion, so they voluntarily retire and join other work. However, I don't think this opportunity will be taken by many in the civil administration. But if the option is there, I don't see any harm."

The commission will recommend lowering the number of ministries and divisions to 25 to 30 from the current 55.

The Economic Strategy Redefinition Task Force has already recommended merging the road, rail, water, and air transport ministries.

The commission may recommend not allowing officials of one institution to work in another on deputation.

It may recommend promotions to the rank of deputy secretary based on the Senior Service Pool (SSP) Order-1979.

The SSP initiative was taken during President Ziaur Rahman's tenure. It was not implemented by the HM Ershad government.

In that case, opportunities for administration cadre promotions to the rank of deputy secretary may be more limited.

However, the commission is also going to recommend reserving 50 percent of the positions for administration cadre promotions to the rank of deputy secretary.

Army camp commander

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The armed forces' press wing also said that legal action would be taken against those found guilty as per military law.

"Appropriate steps have been taken to investigate this unexpected and regrettable incident. In the meantime, the commander of the army camp in question has been withdrawn with immediate effect," read the ISPR statement issued yesterday.

Meanwhile, the government has also ordered an urgent investigation.

In a statement issued by the CA Press Wing, Muhammad Yunus condemned any form of custodial torture and extrajudicial killings, stating that upholding human rights in all aspects of national life remains a core mission of the administration, which includes some of the country's top rights activists.

Touhidul was buried at his family graveyard after his funeral around 2:30pm yesterday.

He was the convener of Jubo Dal's Panchthubi union unit.

Touhidul used to work at a shipping company in Chattogram. He returned home on January 26 after his father's death. The family was supposed to hold a qulkhani on Friday.

In the early hours of Friday, Touhidul was picked up from his home in Ittala village by men who identified themselves as members of the joint forces, said his wife.

Later in the morning, Touhidul was found dead at Cumilla Medical College Hospital.

Speaking to this newspaper on Friday, Mohinul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said, "The joint forces informed us around 11:00am that an injured man was found in Jhakunipara on the banks of the Gumti River. Police took Touhidul to Cumilla Medical College Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead."

His body bore marks of trauma

and injuries, according to an inquest report prepared by the Kotwali Police Station. However, Touhidul's family has yet to file a case.

CONDEMNATIONS

Different political parties and human rights organisations, including BNP, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BASOD), and Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) have expressed concern and outrage over Touhidul's death.

They stated that such incidents are a violation of human rights and the rule of law. They emphasised the need to identify those involved in the killing and ensure justice through a proper investigation.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "It's unfortunate that such extrajudicial killings are taking place during the tenure of an interim government supported by political parties participating in the democratic movement after the fall of the Awami fascist government in the student-public movement. This brutality reminds us of the Awami fascist era"

"No government forces have the right to torture and kill anyone. No matter how powerful the perpetrator is, bringing them under the law and ensuring exemplary punishment is one of the conditions of the rule of law," Fakhrul said in a statement issued yesterday.

Rights group Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) also expressed concern over Touhidul's death. It demanded a trial of the culprits involved after a neutral probe.

"It's the state's duty to ensure the safety of a person detained by the state," ASK said in a statement, adding that such a kind of death is not acceptable at all.

ASK urged authorities to take proper steps to ensure justice for the family and provide them with compensation.

People suffer as students keep blocking road

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protesters marched towards Gulshan-1 and blocked the intersection around 6:40pm, which caused a traffic jam that lasted until 7:50pm.

The students then announced the withdrawal of the blockade from the intersection, considering public suffering. However, they soon marched back to the college gate and resumed blocking the road at Mohakhali.

The students ended their demonstration for the day around 8:10pm, vowing to resume the protests and continue until their demands are met.

Mahmudul Hasan Muktar, a political science student and spokesperson for the protesters, said, "We will engage in talks only if someone comes forward with a proposal on a full-fledged university."

He added they would strongly resist any attempts to politicise their demand.

On Friday, the protesters issued an ultimatum, demanding that Titumir College be declared a university by 4:00pm the next day, or they would block roads or railways in north Dhaka under the programme "Barasat Barricade to North City".

Some students had been on a

hunger strike in front of the college's main gate since Thursday. As of yesterday, 12 students were on hunger strike. Six of them were hospitalised after falling ill.

Meanwhile, the education ministry urged the protesters to have patience, saying that the issue was under consideration.

It said in a statement that a committee, led by the University Grants Commission chairman, is working on plans to establish a separate university for the seven colleges affiliated with Dhaka University, including Titumir College.

The ministry said the concerns of

the students were being addressed with empathy, and the committee already held discussions with student representatives from Titumir College and the other six colleges.

The statement said the government was committed to enhancing educational opportunities and improving the quality of these institutions. It added that all possible solutions are being explored.

The ministry also advised the protesters to refrain from setting deadlines and actions that could disrupt public life or interfere with regular academic activities at the college.

Only wealthy have access to politics

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money on community events, make donations to local institutions and work to build public support through informal patron-client networks, the report said.

"A common perception in Bangladesh is that those unable to spend money cannot be credible candidates for MP."

Many politicians interviewed for the report indicated that candidates often spend between Tk 2 to 5 crore to gain the favour of influential party leaders, particularly within the AL and Jatiya Party.

"In some cases, additional payments were allegedly made directly to members of the prime minister's family to secure nominations," it said. Jatiya Party Secretary General Mujibul Haque denied the allegations brought on by the report. "This allegation is an absurd one. None have to pay for getting party nomination," he told The Daily Star.

During the campaign phase, candidates need to spend Tk 3-5 crore or even more depending on the constituency and level of competition.

Candidates have to spend money on the day of the polls to secure votes

on top of their electioneering costs: a minimum of Tk 50 lakh was spent on average per candidate on the election day.

Vote buying was a feature of all election contests in 2024, with payments per vote being Tk 1,000 to Tk 5,000.

Candidates in Bangladesh's elections typically rely on formal and informal funding sources. The formal sources include contributions from political parties and personal savings. Informal sources include donations from businesses, vested interest groups and sometimes illicit contributions from foreign actors and criminal syndicates.

This illegal funding typically originates from tax evasion, extortion and organised crime syndicates, which provide financial backing to candidates in exchange for political influence once elected, the report said.

Even after winning the election, some candidates need to spend another Tk 4 to 5 lakh to expedite administrative processes such as the official publication of election results or necessary documentation.

"Because of the highly expensive election process, only people who have wealth are getting the

chance to enter into politics," said Shahab Enam Khan, one of the researchers for the report and a professor of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

As much as 85 percent of the MPs possess movable or liquid assets worth Tk 1 crore each or more in 2024, according to Transparency International Bangladesh. Nearly 82 percent of the lawmakers possessed assets worth more than Tk 1 crore in the 2018 parliament, according to Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

Some of the interviewees even said that the election expenditure might be about Tk 100 crore in some constituencies, said Nurul Huda Sakib, another researcher for the report.

"High election expenditure has become a normal matter. We reported the average figure of election expense, the figure might be much more than that."

The high cost of elections is leading to an increasing number of businessmen entering politics, he said.

"This trend is also contributing to the growth of crony capitalism and kleptocracy," said Sakib, a professor at Jahangirnagar University's

department of government and politics.

As much as 66 percent of the elected MPs were businessmen in the 2024 parliament. In the 1991 parliament, 38 percent of the MPs were businessmen. In the 1973 parliament, only 18 percent of the MPs were businessmen.

"The use of money and muscle have increased businessmen in politics and as a whole criminalised politics," said Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of Ruhin Hossain Prince.

To strengthen legal frameworks and promote a coordinated approach in deterring financial misconduct, kleptocracy and the illicit use of wealth in electoral processes, fostering collaboration among key institutions is essential, the report said.

It proposed a task force composed of the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Information Commission of Bangladesh, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Election Commission to oversee the political parties' candidate selection processes and campaigns.

The report also suggested facilitating party nomination based on merit rather than privilege.

Who will I call baba now?

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and took away our phones. They said they were looking for illegal firearms and ransacked the house but found nothing. Then they left with my husband on a pickup truck without explaining why he was being taken. They said they wouldn't hurt him

"In the morning, they came back to our village. They were looking for a local named Kawser. Touhidul was with them at the time. He looked badly hurt."

Yesmin said Touhidul was not involved in any criminal activities.

"We want justice. We want those

involved in his killing to be punished." Lutfur Rahman, a neighbour, who was detained alongside Touhidul, said, "They broke into my house and picked me up too. We were taken to the local army camp. There they tied Touhidul to a tree and tortured him all night. The individuals involved were wearing masks."

Touhidul's niece, Mahbuba Uddin, a teacher at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, said, "We spoke with army officials. An army officer from Cumilla Cantonment, Lieutenant Colonel Mahmudul

Hasan, assured us that the army would take action against those responsible."

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Ekushey spirit

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The chief adviser said this explosion instilled the determination of building a "New Bangladesh" and was deeply rooted in the country's 170 million people.

"We have come to take an oath on this commitment through this ceremony of Amar Ekushey," he said.

Yunus said on August 5 last year, the historic student-mass uprising brought down a 16-year autocratic regime.

The chief adviser recalled with deep respect all the courageous students, masses and workers who gave their lives and were brutally injured in the July uprising.

The uprising achieved through great sacrifice has brought this year's book fair before the people with a new significance, he said.

The theme of this year's book fair is "The July uprising: Rebuilding a new Bangladesh".

"The July uprising strongly united the nation. Because of this, we found

the courage to rebuild a country devastated economically, politically, institutionally, and humanely," he said.

"Our young men and women, teenagers, painted their dreams, their aspirations, their demands on the walls of the streets with incredible determination. Our street walls have now been transformed into historical documents," he said.

Congratulating the book fair organisers for presenting these murals at gates of the fair, the chief adviser said the boi mela, organised by Bangla Academy, has become an integral part of national life.

Stressing the need for recognising the contributions of Bangladeshi expatriates and expatriate workers, he said Bangladeshis are showing their achievements in various fields all over the world.

"We want to remember all of them on Ekushey. They all celebrate Ekushey February remembering their country..." Yunus said.

Swechchhasebak Dal leader

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injured. He was taken to Nangalkot Upazila Health Complex where on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Medical officer at the hospital Md Masud Alam said the person was brought dead around 3:10pm.

"However, no injury mark was found in his body. The cause of his death could not be known

immediately," he told The Daily Star.

Nangalkot Police Station's Officer-in-Charge AK Fazlul Haque said their preliminary probe suggests that Selim was killed during a clash between two groups of BNP men.

Gafur could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts.

Contacted, Alam said he knew nothing about the clash.