

## Japan to provide \$1.8m aid to Rohingyas

UNB, Dhaka

The government of Japan has signed an agreement with the World Food Programme to provide \$1.8 million in life-saving food assistance to Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, according to a press release from the Embassy of Japan yesterday.

The aid will support over 191,000 refugees through malnutrition prevention programmes, income-generating activities, and rehabilitation of e-voucher outlets. The Rohingya community, living without livelihood opportunities, remains entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance for survival.

WFP Country Director Dom Scalpelli emphasised the need for continued support as the crisis enters

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The leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement brought out a rally on the Dhaka University campus last night, demanding the immediate arrest of those who attacked their members at Khulna University of Engineering and Technology earlier in the day. The attack incident also sparked protests across several other university campuses.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## ‘It came as a surprise to me’

Rafiqun Nabi on being barred from taking stage at DU art exhibition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent artist Professor Rafiqun Nabi (Ranabi), creator of the iconic “Tokai” character, said that it was unexpected that university authorities asked him to not take the stage at the annual art exhibition of the drawing and painting department at Dhaka University’s Fine Arts faculty on Monday morning.

Rafiqun Nabi told this newspaper that despite being a special guest and emeritus professor, he was informed that Pro-VC Prof Mamun Ahmed would not attend the event if he took the stage. The reason for this objection was not made clear to him.

“Although this came as a surprise to me, I decided to leave to avoid disrupting the event.”

Moinul Abedin, son of legendary artist Zainul Abedin, who was with him, also left quietly.



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## India can

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communities, dismissing allegations of widespread violence as sensationalised by Indian media.

“I would invite you to go through the findings of the UN, which has been published two days ago, and say that [the interim government was not involved in the violence]. They came at our request as we wanted an absolutely neutral survey of the situation,” he said.

Regarding the Adani power project, Touhid mentioned that the interim government in Bangladesh is currently in talks with the Indian conglomerate.

He indicated that while the initial power agreements had faced criticism due to high tariffs, the government is now negotiating for a more reasonable deal.

“We will look at it with the Adani Group and try to make it [the deal] more rational,” he said, adding that the restoration of power supply is a priority for Bangladesh’s ongoing infrastructure projects.

After holding talks with his Indian counterpart, S Jaishankar, at the Omani capital, Touhid said he hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus may finally meet on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in April. He told the Hindu that he had mentioned it to the Indian foreign minister but nothing concrete has emerged yet, as these things are planned just days ahead once the full programme is finalised.

## Apologise if you are to join polls

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“If someone [AL members] wants to contest elections, there will be no obstruction. They can contest polls. However, if any person is accused of mass killing, they will not be allowed to participate in the elections under any circumstances,” he added.

Asif Mahmud made the remarks while speaking to journalists after the sixth session of the third and final day of the Deputy Commissioners’ Conference 2025 at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka.

He also said no final decision has been made regarding local government elections before the national election, but a decision regarding the matter will be taken soon.

“Officials currently performing additional responsibilities as [administrators] in various local government institutions, frequently urging us to appoint [full-time] administrators or conduct elections,” he said.

Asif also said that not having elected representatives in local government institutions for so long has become a grave issue.

He pointed out that divisional commissioners are performing additional responsibilities to run some city corporations, and district commissioners have to fulfil the duties of the district councils.

“When an officer has to perform two or three duties, it becomes difficult for one person to handle all the responsibilities together,” Asif said.

He said the government will decide whether to hold elections or appoint administrators to run the local government agencies.

It would be good to hold local government elections before the national election. Local government institutions can play an important role in organising a good national election.

“But my personal opinion does not determine the decision. The final decision will come from the government after discussions with other political parties,” the adviser said.

## Kuet tensions spill onto other campuses

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the Ershad regime in the 1990s, and attempting to derail democracy in 1996.

“Now, they are disguising themselves as general students to run a campaign against Chhatra Dal,” he warned.

The JCD attempted to march towards Raju Bhaskorjo around 8:15pm, but due to the presence of anti-discrimination students, they held a brief rally near Rokeya Hall.

On the other hand, Hasnat Abdullah, leader of the anti-discrimination students, told a rally at Dhaka University last night, “Whoever wants to emerge as the Chhatra League and take a position against students will face the same consequences the banned student organisation had faced.”

They will today exhibit at Dhaka University the photos and videos of the oppression during July uprising and what they said were Chhatra Dal and local BNP men’s attack on students at Kuet.

The exhibition will be streamed and projected on large screens at other universities.

At Jahangirnagar University, Touhid Mohammad Siam, a leader of the anti-discrimination students, said at a demonstration, “If they resort to such violence without being in power, one can only imagine how reckless they will become if they are in power. It took 36 days to depose a dictator like Hasina. It won’t take more than 36 minutes to oust the BNP and its student wing if they continue their terrorist activities.”

**WHAT HAPPENED AT KUET**

On Monday, pro-BNP Chhatra Dal activists distributed handbills that said students should be able to engage in politics, according to sources.

In response, the anti-discrimination activists marched on

campus in the afternoon yesterday, chanting slogans denouncing student politics.

The situation became tense when they were marching past a group of Chhatra Dal activists.

Around 1:00pm, the groups began chasing each other and clashed until 6:00pm, said witnesses.

Photos of injured students and men holding large scythes and machetes went viral on Facebook in the afternoon. The warring sides said they were not the ones who brought the sharp weapons.

Mirajul Islam Emon, spokesperson of the anti-discrimination students, said Chhatra Dal activists had brought local BNP men to attack the students.

“They stabbed some students and assaulted others,” he said.

Police said around 45 people were injured.

Ahmmad Ishtiaq, former convener of Khulna city Chhatra Dal, who was at the scene, said members of Chhatra Shibir, along with a few supporters of Chhatra League, were trying to stop Chhatra Dal’s political activities on and around the campus.

“This led to the clashes,” he told The Daily Star.

Khulna’s Khan Jahan Ali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Kabir Hossain said around 45 people were injured.

Kuet Vice-Chancellor Mohammad Mashud refused to comment on the situation.

Around 10:00pm last night, a group of students under the banner of General Students of Khulna University of Engineering and Technology held a press conference.

They demanded a complete ban on student politics, punishment of the attackers, and resignations of the VC, Pro-VC, and Student Welfare Director. Until the demands are met,

all classes and exams will remain suspended at Kuet, they said.

**PROTESTS ON CAMPUSES**

At DU, Students Against Discrimination demanded the arrest of those who attacked its members at Kuet within 24 hours.

They marched on campus and held a rally where Arif Sohel, convener of the student body, said, “The oppression we fought against has returned. The students and people who were martyred in the July uprising did not die so that we can witness such oppression on campuses. Anyone who tries to engage in criminal activities again will face resistance. We will not compromise with anyone. Some of the defeated fascists from August 5 are trying to rehabilitate themselves.”

Hasnat Abdullah said an exhibition of the photos of the uprising and yesterday’s attack will commence at 3:00pm at DU.

Chittagong University campus was tense as student groups came face-to-face.

A section of university students, mostly from Inqilab Manch, and JCD marched on campus.

Md Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, inspector of the Chittagong University police outpost, said, “To prevent any untoward incidents, police are on high alert.”

At Jahangirnagar University, protesters marched around 8:00pm and held a brief rally.

At Rajshahi University, anti-discrimination students demonstrated until 9:30pm.

Coordinator Salahuddin Ammar said, “We don’t want student politics. It destroys the campus environment.”

There were protests at Jagannath University too.

[Our Chattogram staff, and RU, JU, and JnU correspondents contributed to this report]

## Prepare for nat’l election

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serve as returning officers during national elections, that there would be no pressure from higher authorities.

Speaking to reporters after the session, he said, “In the past, there was pressure from high-ups... I’ve assured them that there will be no unlawful pressure exerted on them this time. We won’t impose any unjust pressure, and if there is any, we’ll remove it.”

He added that the DCs should not wait until election day or just a few days before it to be involved in the electoral process.

“Consider yourselves already actively involved in the process from now. Wherever you speak, whether at meetings or gatherings, a portion of your speech should focus on election.”

He said awareness needs to be raised among people regarding the election as many of them have lost faith in the country’s electoral system.

“So when you [DCs] speak to the people, make an effort to educate them about their voting rights.”

Referring to DCs as “companions of the EC during polls,” he stressed that they must proactively enforce the law and perform their duties impartially.

“We’ve instructed them [DCs]

to address election irregularities proactively, not reactively – meaning they should take action as soon as they learn about a violation instead of waiting until a journalist or anyone else makes a complaint,” he told reporters, adding that the EC hopes the DCs perform their duties as per their promise.

Highlighting that poll duties are an obligation for DCs, the CEC further said, “We promised the nation a free and fair election and we want to fulfill this promise. I’ve requested the DCs and divisional commissioners to play their parts fully.”

Asked about discussions regarding local polls before the national election, he said the matter had not been raised.

“They [DCs] are aware of what’s happening at the national level. This [question of whether local polls will come before national polls] is an ongoing political debate. From what you can see, we don’t want to be a part of that debate. We’ll look into the matter once a decision is made.”

The session was also attended by four election commissioners and senior EC officials, who briefed the DCs on electoral rules and regulations.

## Expanding trade horizon

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Both India and China will be very influential in this region in future and Bangladesh needs to handle its foreign policy efficiently to navigate these dynamics successfully.

Besides, Bangladesh needs to be proactive in strengthening its relationship with the SAARC and other Southeast Asian countries to ensure economic growth, she added.

Maintaining a balanced relationship with both India and China is essential, said ASM Ali Ashraf, chairman of the International Relations department at Dhaka University.

Highlighting the importance of economic considerations in foreign policy, he said: “We need to identify our major trading partners. As changes in the trade relationship are not possible overnight, we should focus on expanding our market while maintaining existing relationships with these partners.”

For its own interest, Bangladesh needs to maintain a relationship with the influential countries, he added.

Bangladesh is a bridge between ASEAN and SAARC countries, said Mohammad Abdur Rob, vice-chancellor of Manarat International University, in another session.

“The distance between Bangladesh and China, a market of around 150 crore, is only 64 miles. It means the country’s location is much too significant for around half of the world’s population, not only for trade and commerce but also as a strategic and security hub.”

Criticising the previous Awami League regime’s claim of the “victory of the sea”, he said it was a big loss for Bangladesh as the country lost South Talpatti Island to India and territory sea to Myanmar.

The Talpatti island has huge hydrocarbon potential, he said.

An autonomous foreign policy that may increase friendship with ASEAN countries including Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and Thailand is recommended.

“We need a strong bond with China,” he added.

Bangladesh should fix its foreign policy based on fixing the enemy states and trade interests, said Asaduzzaman Fuaad, general secretary of AB Party.

Bangladesh should have learned from Pakistan on how it balances its relationship with the US and China, said Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of Nationalist Democratic Movement.

“We need a political consensus on the foreign policy too,” he said.

Worldwide, foreign policy depends on economic interests, said BNP’s Organising Secretary Shama Obaid.

“We also want our economic growth and the interconnectivity of youths across the globe. The ministry of foreign affairs is the same as what

was it during the Hasina regime. It failed to respond to the propaganda of Indian media after August 5, which it needed to do.”

She demanded the revival of SAARC.

Following the July uprising, Bangladesh’s foreign policy must be redefined with a priority on national interests, said Sarjis Alam, chief organiser of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, in the third session.

“We had been following a foreign policy of self-preservation, but now we need to take a bold and decisive stance.”

The country’s focus will no longer be limited to just India, China and the US. It will extend to Russia, Japan, the Middle East and from the Strait of Gibraltar to both sides of the Panama Canal.

“If anyone wants to exert influence over us, let it be clear – our approach towards them will be the same as theirs towards us. We are not dependent on anyone – we are mutually interdependent,” he added.

The July uprising has major implications for the Bay of Bengal, primarily strategic autonomy, said Shahab Enam Khan, a professor of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

“We must maintain our strategic autonomy because we own the resources, the waters – everything belongs to us.”

Calling for a national consensus on the Myanmar issue, Khan urged policymakers to take action.

Abul Kalam Mohammad Humayun Kabir, a retired army general and a former ambassador, underscored the Bay of Bengal’s importance from a critical security standpoint.

“External forces should think carefully before exerting control over us,” he added.

Without a new economic settlement, a new political settlement would not emerge, said Akram Hossain, the joint principal organiser of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

“For the past 15 years, the Bay of Bengal was controlled by a handful of individuals. This must change. In this new era of restructuring, discussions on youth and women’s participation are crucial,” he added.

SM Suja Uddin, a member of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, highlighted the economic potential of the Bay of Bengal region.

If policies are formulated involving local stakeholders, the region’s economy could significantly contribute to the GDP, he added.

In the fourth session, Jahangirnagar University VC Kamrul Ahsan, noted photographer and activist Shahidul Alam, Jatiya Nagorik Committee’s Joint Convener Tasnim Jara and Joint Member Secretary Mahbub Alam, among others, spoke.