

Polls to take place in December

Says Mahfuj Alam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Mahfuj Alam yesterday called upon all to prepare for the next general election, saying that the polls would be held within the December timeline.

“Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said that the election would be held on time. It is scheduled for the end of this year, in December,” he said at a prayer and iftar event organised for the injured in the July uprising.

“A timeline has already been set, and the election will take place within that timeframe. Everyone should start preparing for it.”

Mahfuj hoped that the political parties would act responsibly, and the state organs would stop sabotage and cooperate properly so that the election could be held at the right time.

“No matter what organisation you belong to, your responsibility as part of the uprising is to stay united – against the Awami League, in demanding reforms, and in seeking justice,” he added.



An aerial photograph taken yesterday shows smoke billowing from a substation supplying power to Heathrow Airport amid efforts to douse the remainder of the flames after a fire broke out in Hayes, west London. Britain's Heathrow airport, Europe's busiest, was shut down early yesterday after a major fire at an electricity substation cut power to the sprawling facility west of London, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

Fourth-grader raped in Pabna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fourth-grader was allegedly raped by her nephew in the Gopinathpur area of Shanthia upazila in Pabna, on Wednesday night.

The victim's family filed a case with the Shanthia Police Station, and police arrested suspect Md Akash, 19, on Thursday.

The accused, a resident of Gopinathpur village, was sent to jail yesterday by a court.

Saidur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Shanthia Police Station, said the incident occurred when Akash visited his grandfather's house, near the victim's residence on Wednesday.

The victim, who had gone to the house that day, was allegedly raped by Akash. The victim later disclosed the incident to her family, prompting her father to file a case against Akash, said family members, and police officials.

The victim was sent to Pabna General Hospital for a medical examination on Friday, the OC added.

In another development in Patuakhali, police have arrested another suspect in connection with the gang rape of a college student in Dumki in Patuakhali on March 1.

A team from Patuakhali Detective Branch police conducted a raid and arrested the juvenile suspect who had been hiding at a relative's house yesterday.

Confirming the arrest, Patuakhali DB Police officer-in-charge Md Jasim Uddin said the suspect was handed over to Dumki Police Station.

On Wednesday afternoon, Dumki police arrested the other suspect Sakib Munshi, 19.

Eid joy eludes jobless workers

FROM PAGE 1

Alif Hossain used to earn around Tk 25,000 per month, including overtime, as a senior washing operator until the Beximco factory, where he worked, was shut down last year.

Struggling to support his parents, wife, and son, he remains in Dhaka, paying Tk 4,000 monthly rent in hopes of finding work after Eid. “I’ve been going through a tough time,” said Alif.

However, Sohan Mia, who drew Tk 29,000 per month, returned to his village to Bogura after receiving his arrears and service benefits following the shutdown.

Sohan was able to pay his outstanding rent before leaving Dhaka, but he remains unemployed and deeply stressed about the future of his seven-year-old son, wife, and sister.

“How can my family feel the joy of Eid when I don’t have a job?” he asked.

Milon Mia from Kurigram, who previously earned Tk 35,000 a month as a senior supervisor, is now struggling with temporary daily wage work in a subcontracting factory. “Supporting five family members, including parents and siblings, has become nearly impossible this Eid,” he said.

A former senior store-in-charge at a garment factory in Savar, where he worked for 32 years, could not join any factory after losing his job. “My two children have stopped going to school,” he said.

The factory management promised to pay nearly Tk 15 lakh in service benefits and arrears a lot earlier, but the payment is uncertain as the management does not respond to his phone calls anymore, he said.

Requesting not to mention the factory name, he alleged that the government gave it interest-free loans to pay the workers, but the factory management did not disburse the money.

The factories owned by people linked to the ousted Awami League government were particularly hit by the political changeover. Beximco Group shut down 14 textile and garment units after its vice chairman, Salman F

Rahman, an adviser to deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, landed in jail.

Factories vandalised, ransacked, or set ablaze during and after the July uprising are also struggling to reopen due to financial constraints and legal challenges faced by politically exposed owners.

The affected factories include five tyre factories of Gazi Group, three plastic factories of Bengal Group, and numerous garment factories in industrial areas such as Ashulia, Savar, Zirabo, and Zirani.

Faruque Hassan, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said, “Factories faced liquidity issues due to last year’s political disruptions, compounded by domestic economic instability and global inflation.”

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government should collect real data on unemployed workers to take proper steps for them.

Many workers were unemployed, but at the same time, new factories were opened, and old ones were expanded, where many were re-employed, he said.

However, small and medium enterprises were facing difficulties in re-employing the laid-off workers, Moazzem said.

“The government can use the funds given by the European Union for unemployed workers during the Covid-19 pandemic to create an unemployment insurance scheme so that laid-off workers can tackle the shock,” he added.

Employment Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman acknowledged that the ministry did not have exact data on how many factories were closed since the political changeover.

Regarding the re-employment of the workers, Shafiquzzaman said a committee was working on the issue so that the workers can find jobs in the member factories of the BGMEA and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), and units inside the Export Processing

Zones.

He also said that apart from Beximco, the government financially supported six garment factories facing payment difficulties.

Md Towhidur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation, highlighted the severe difficulties workers face this Eid.

“Although terminated workers from Beximco received government-assisted service benefits, many remain unemployed,” he said.

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Initially, the Industrial Police listed 203 factories at risk of failing to pay workers before this Eid, with additional verification by the BGMEA and BKMEA.

However, the number would be significantly lower after further assessment due to the government’s disbursement of nearly Tk 2,325 crore from unpaid cash incentives for garment exporters, Secretary Shafiquzzaman said.

He also said the government had been coordinating with the BGMEA, BKMEA, and other agencies to manage payment issues effectively.

BGMEA administrator Anwar Hossain said 98 member factories were initially identified as vulnerable, but after reassessment, only five to 10 factories may be critically affected. Additionally, to tackle liquidity shortages, BGMEA managed funds from unpaid cash incentives.

“Last week, the government disbursed Tk 2,000 crore, and another Tk 325 crore is underway for small and medium enterprises. However, around seven factories may only pay bonuses before Eid, deferring salary payments until after the holiday,” Anwar said.

Mohammad Mamun, an officer-in-charge of Industrial Police, said the situation over back pay at the factories before Eid was worse than that of previous years, with firms that are not members of BGMEA and BKMEA particularly vulnerable.

The police were collaborating closely with the BGMEA and BKMEA to resolve the payment crisis, he added.

Debate, demo swirl over banning AL

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Around the same time Hasnat made his Facebook post, a group of Dhaka University students marched on campus, demanding a ban on the AL.

The students, led by former coordinators of Students Against Discrimination, AB Zubayer and Musaddiq Ali Ibne Muhammad, marched to Raju Bhaskarjo and held a brief rally there.

Zubayer said various political groups, agencies, and communities were putting pressure on the government not to ban the AL.

“There won’t be any election until the Awami League is banned or the trial for massacre takes place,” he said.

There were similar demonstrations at Rajshahi University (RU), Jagannath University (JnU) and Jahangirnagar University (JU), demanding a ban on the AL yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, at an event in the capital’s Dakshinkhan area, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said, “If individuals who are to lead the Awami League have committed no crimes, have no involvement student killings or embezzlement, then why can’t such an Awami League participate in politics?”

People are discussing whether the AL should be banned, but they are not questioning whether those responsible for the mass murder should be held accountable, he said.

“Didn’t people see... which police officer, which OC, which AC, which DC played a role there? Which Awami League leader ordered the bloodshed during the mass movement? The trial must be ensured without delay,” he added.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman wrote on Facebook that the people would not accept AL’s rehabilitation. He urged people to rise above party affiliations and exercise restraint and be vigilant and united.

“Bangladesh is going through a critical juncture in its history... the fallen fascists are conspiring at home and abroad to destabilise the country,” he wrote.

The people want trial of those responsible for “genocide”, the rehabilitation of the families of the martyrs of 2024, proper treatment for the “countless” injured, and fundamental reforms to clean up the mess created over the last 15 years, he said.

NCP leader Sarjis Alam wrote: “We are ready for the second chapter of the fight. This fight will continue until the genocidal Awami League is banned.”

TO BAN OR NOT

Contacted, Anu Muhammad, former teacher at Jahangirnagar University, said he was not in favour of banning a political party.

“The Jamaat-e-Islami was banned. But that did not stop the party’s political activities. I think the Awami League should be dealt with political programmes, not a ban,” he said.

“The Awami League leaders guilty of killing students and civilians during the July uprising must be punished. The decision of how Awami League would do politics should be made after the trial. If the Awami League is banned, it would go underground.”

Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said he was not in favour of banning any political party.

“If a political party or organisation commits such crimes that warrant a ban, then the matter should be discussed accordingly. At present, no such ground is on our table that requires taking immediate action to ban Awami League,” he said.

Prince said, “The Awami League has carried out a large-scale massacre, and the key issue here is ensuring the trial of those involved.”

Gonosmhati Andolon leader Zonayed Saki said, “First, there should be trials of those guilty of killing. We have said that Awami League’s responsibility as an organisation should be put to trial.”

Asked whether the AL should be banned, he said, “Political consensus is needed. There can even be a commission to decide the future of the Awami League.”

Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna said banning the AL would not have caused any problem. “Many countries have banned political parties. Even if it is not banned, there is little chance the Awami League will participate in the upcoming election,” he said.

In an ideal situation, the government would have simply ignored the AL question and the people would have shunned the party, he said.

“But the discussion persists. There had been talks about an inclusive political approach and not banning anyone. In some cases, the Awami

League was praised. Thus, the party has managed to remain in politics,” he added.

At an event, Information and Broadcasting Adviser Mahfuj Alam yesterday said, “The Awami League is essentially a fascist organisation. You have already seen evidence that it is not a domestic force but rather a power transplanted from abroad. Delhi pulls its strings.”

“If we do not remain united and politically confront the challenges, the Awami League will return. And if the Awami League returns, neither the youth nor the students will have freedom or safety.”

Contacted, the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate last night said it had no comment on the matter.

CAMPUS PROTESTS

At DU, Bangladesh Democratic Students’ Council (BDSC) and Inquilab Mancha demonstrated separately in the afternoon.

A group of BDSC students marched on campus and held a brief rally. Its Member Secretary Zahid Ahsan said the AL would not be allowed to participate in politics. “Decisions made at an isolated office will not be implemented in Bangladesh.”

BDSC’s DU unit spokesperson Rehnuma Hridy said decisions would be made by the people.

“Many political parties are working behind the scenes to rehabilitate the Awami League. They want to seize power without any reforms and establish a new fascist system,” she said.

Meanwhile, a new platform named “Gonohottakari Awami League Nishiddhokoron Andolon” was launched yesterday with AB Zubayer and Musaddiq Ali Ibne Muhammad as the key organisers.

A group of 10-15 people under the banner of July Mancha staged a sit-in at the Shahbagh intersection around 3:30pm, demanding a ban on the AL.

At JU, students marched and held a rally at the main gate of the university.

At RU, over 200 students from various educational institutions, as well as professionals and locals demonstrated in the afternoon.

At JnU, students marched and then held a brief rally in front of the main gate.

Raihan Hasan Rabbi, general secretary of JnU Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, and Shibir leader Riazul Islam spoke at the event.

Political decisions rest solely with political entities

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During the briefing at the Jatiya Nagorik Committee office at Banglamotor, Nahid said despite the recent UN report which explicitly stated that the crimes committed in Bangladesh in July are tantamount to “international crimes”, the slow pace of the trial is condemnable.

“Since our inception, we have been saying that without ensuring trial for the crimes, acknowledgment of the crimes, and regret, any effort to allow the Awami League to continue as a political entity is tantamount to rehabilitating the fascists,” Nahid said.

The party also demanded revoking the AL’s registration with the Election Commission. “The NCP pledges to resist any attempt by this mafia group to return to politics,” he added.

Nahid said all political parties must keep in mind that the AL is not a democratic political party; it is a fascist organisation.

“It [AL] was not defeated in an election. As an organisation, the Awami League made a deliberate decision to commit mass killings in Bangladesh. Consequently, it was overthrown through

an unprecedented student-citizen uprising in the country’s history. As a result, the Awami League currently exists outside the democratic framework,” said the NCP convener.

He also urged the government and all anti-fascist political forces to unite to ensure the AL’s trial and cancellation of its registration.

Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser (South) of the newly launched NCP, said politicians would do politics.

“Since the discussion we had was initiated by senior military authorities, we deem it as an interference in political affairs. Politics should be determined by politicians, and the course of political events or the future direction of politics should remain in their hands.”

Hasnat stated that both formal and informal discussions have taken place with military officials since August 5 and the context of March 11 was different, as high-ranking officials were on the other side of the discussion.

“I have clarified the sequence of events in my statement, where everything has been presented [Facebook post],” he said.

He further explained that they were

Rohingyas are victims

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The global community must engage actively to ensure their early repatriation to their homeland in Myanmar, Yunus said.

On this occasion, Bangladesh reaffirmed its unwavering

commitment to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance in all its forms.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

“As a state party to ICERD, Bangladesh upholds non-discrimination as a core principle of governance and society,” said the chief adviser.

Drying up alarmingly

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The existing water services heavily rely on groundwater, with about 70 percent of the water supply provided by Dhaka WASA being sourced from aquifers, according to WASA documents.

The rest is refined from the Shitalakkhiya, Buriganga and Padma by the five water treatment plants dotted around Dhaka.

Dhaka WASA produced about 2,680 million litres of water (mld) per day for 20 million residents of the capital and its suburban areas, according to its annual report of fiscal 2022-23.

As per Dhaka WASA’s projection, the demand for water this year would be 3,598 mld per day, meaning more water has to be extracted from the aquifer – an unsustainable practice, as per the water supply master plan of Dhaka WASA published in 2014.

Despite annual recharge every year, there is an overall declining trend in groundwater level due to over-extraction, according to the master plan.

Subsequently, it advocated shifting the bulk source of water from groundwater to surface water to limit the supply from deep tube wells to 1,260 mld per day.

A large-scale extraction from such aquifers may cause a permanent depletion of water level, said Anwar Zahid, a senior groundwater researcher.

In the 1970s, the groundwater level was less than one metre below the surface. Now, it has dropped to 70 metres, according to his research.

In 2022, the groundwater levels in



Even though this tubewell is 200 feet deep, the declining groundwater levels prevent it from lifting water during the dry season.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

the city’s densely populated areas of Mirpur, Monipur, Sabujbagh, Tejgaon, and Basabo were 66, 63, 66 and 63 metres below the surface respectively.

In contrast, in river-adjacent areas of Mohammadpur, Gandaria and Hazaribagh, the levels are at 36.5, 21 and 33 metres respectively.

Every year, the groundwater level is depleting by one to 1.5 metres.

If the government does not take any measures, the groundwater level in densely populated areas will drop to 100 metres by 2050.

The key principle of sustainable groundwater management is ensuring that annual water extraction does not

exceed the natural recharge rate.

“However, in Dhaka, this balance has been dangerously disrupted,” Zahid said.

The aquifers in the Dhaka metropolitan area are permanently losing more than 500 million cubic metres of water annually, he said, citing a study. And this is not being replenished through natural recharge.

It is imperative to create opportunities for artificial groundwater recharge using various methods to improve the water table, he said, adding that the quality of water used for recharge must be ensured.