

Yunus urges China to reduce interest rates

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has reiterated its call for reducing interest rates for Chinese loans from 3 percent to 1.2 percent, while also seeking a waiver on commitment fees for Chinese-funded projects.

The call was made yesterday during Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's bilateral meeting with Chinese Executive Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Hainan.

In yesterday's meeting, Ding said his country would fund modernisation efforts of the Mongla Port and the Dasherkandi Sewage project and assured Chinese funding to purchase four ocean-going vessels for Dhaka's state-run Bangladesh Shipping Corporation.

In a separate meeting with China's Export-Import Bank Chairman Chen Huaiyu, Bangladeshi officials sought quick disbursement of Exim Bank's funding and support in new infrastructure projects such as the Dasherkandi Sewage plant.

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PHOTO: CHIEF ADVISER'S PRESS SECRETARY

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus is given a red carpet reception as he lands in Beijing yesterday.

NEWS

DECLINING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: CA press wing rebuts US panel report on Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing has refuted a US commission's report that says religious freedom conditions in Bangladesh declined amid a series of attacks on religious minority communities.

It is simply not true that the interim government of Bangladesh is responsible for the violence alleged in the 2025 report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), says a statement issued by the press wing yesterday.

The USCIRF report says, "Following a violent crackdown on protests that resulted in 200 deaths and the removal of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Hindu groups claimed an increase in attacks against their communities and temples."

However, a UN Fact-Finding Mission earlier reported an estimated 1,400 fatalities during the 2024 mass uprising in Bangladesh.

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Hasina sued for conspiring to wage civil war, oust govt

FROM PAGE 1

information about an online meeting held on December 19, 2024, where participants formed a platform called the "Joy Bangla Brigade" and discussed plans to bring ousted premier Hasina back to power by waging a civil war. A total of 577 individuals from home and abroad attended the meeting and showed support for Hasina's directives.

Rabbi Alam, vice president of Awami League's US chapter who convened the virtual meeting, has been named as the second accused in the case.

At the home ministry's approval, the case has been filed under Sections 121, 121A, 124A, and 34 of the Penal Code.

Court declares Ishraque Dhaka south mayor

FROM PAGE 1

"Following the lawsuit, Taposh submitted various applications through their lawyers to contest it. And it delayed the trial," he said.

"After the fall of Awami League government, the court proceedings sped up as the defendants remained absent and couldn't obstruct the process," he also said.

"In accordance with the court's verdict, the EC Secretariat will take necessary steps for a gazette amendment notification, declaring Ishraque as mayor," added Tawhid.

During the trial, five witnesses, including Ishraque, gave their statements before the court.

On August 19 last year, the government removed the mayors of 12 city corporations, including Taposh, from their positions.

On February 1 of 2020, the DSCC polls were held where Ishraque contested for the post of mayor from BNP.

But he was defeated, and the Election Commission declared Taposh as mayor of the DSCC.

On March 3 of 2020, Ishraque, a member of BNP Chairperson's Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, filed a lawsuit with the election tribunal, demanding cancellation of the election.

The chief election commissioner, commission's secretary, winner candidate Taposh and five others have been made defendants to contest the suit.

In the suit, Ishraque claimed that the February 1 election was held amid irregularities and corruption, adding that on the day, a satisfactory number of voters did not turn up to cast their votes.

Ishraque also alleged that the election commissioner, in collusion with others, declared Taposh the mayor of DSCC.

He also appealed to the tribunal to declare the election process for the post of mayor in the DSCC polls 2020 void and order a fresh election.

On October 1 last year, the Election Tribunal of Chattogram declared BNP leader Shahadat Hossain the mayor of Chattogram City Corporation.

The tribunal gave the verdict following a case filed to cancel the results of the CCC election held on January 27, 2021. Shahadat filed the lawsuit on February 24, 2021.

On October 8 last year, the Election Commission (EC) issued a notification declaring Shahadat as the mayor of Chattogram City Corporation.

TABITHA'S LAWSUIT

On March 2 of 2020, Tabitha Awal, BNP-nominated candidate for the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) mayoral election, filed a similar lawsuit with the same election tribunal, demanding cancellation of the February 1 election.

The tribunal is scheduled on April 7 this year to deliver a verdict in the lawsuit.

Move to revise DAP bad news for Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

The population density in certain neighbourhoods would increase to 50,000 people per square kilometre, far exceeding global benchmarks for liveable megacities, according to Adil Mohammad Khan, president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP).

Adil attributed this to the proposal to change the Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) in the DAP.

FAR is the ratio of the total area of all floors in a building, including habitable and non-habitable spaces, to the area of the land on which the building is located. A higher FAR indicates a greater building volume relative to the lot size.

The DAP currently has an area-based FAR system where the FAR gradually decreases from the central to the peripheral areas of the city.

The FAR had been relaxed in 2023,

without any technical recommendations under pressure from real estate businesses, but now the new draft proposes changing the FAR approval system to a uniform plot-and-road-based one rather than a neighbourhood-based one.

Such changes would not align with fundamental urban planning principles and would encourage the indiscriminate construction of high-rise buildings solely to benefit developers, said Adil.

For example, he said, the introduction of plot-based measurement would increase the FAR to 3.4 from 2 in Badda.

Under the current FAR values, around

three families can live on a two katha (1,440 square feet) piece of land. The number of families would increase to six if the proposal is approved, Adil said.

"Such modifications will increase the population density beyond sustainable limits, undermine the unique character of different neighbourhoods, disrupt urban balance, and risk the destruction of residential communities in Dhaka," he added.

Mohammad Fazle Reza Sumon, former president of BIP, slammed the proposal for changing the FAR value based on planned roads, instead of existing roads.

He said the setback distance between buildings should be strictly maintained, ensuring adequate sunlight and ventilation within residential structures.

A building setback is the minimum distance required between a house or structure and the property line. It is mandated by building codes to allow sunlight to reach streets and lower floors. Setbacks are necessary to protect various areas such as streets, rivers, floodplains, and existing structures.

"To prevent fire hazards and ensure safety, high-rise construction on narrow roads must be prohibited, and buildings taller than six stories should be required to have fire prevention measures," he said.

Sumon said previous amendments to building height regulations in 2006 and 2008 were later partially changed in the 2022 DAP.

"Further height exemptions will worsen Dhaka's population density...,"

overwhelming the city's management system," Sumon said, urging the interim government advisers to avoid any changes that could harm Dhaka's liveability.

He was also critical of the inclusion of the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) in the technical committee responsible for revising DAP. "It creates a clear conflict of interest. Such involvement of real estate businesses in policymaking is unacceptable and must be stopped."

Rehab Senior Vice President Liakat Ali Bhuiyan defended the proposed changes, arguing that restrictive regulations have hurt the real estate sector.

"The new FAR regulations, which limit the height of buildings in many areas, have led to a significant reduction in the available space for residential and commercial properties. As a result, many construction projects have been rendered financially unfeasible," he said.

"Instead, the new regulations are making it even more difficult for developers to meet the growing demand for housing in the country's rapidly expanding urban centres," he added.

Md Ashraful Islam, chief town planner and project director of DAP at Rajuk, said they would send the draft of the amended DAP to all stakeholders for their feedback.

The stakeholders, including planners, will be able to share their observations on the draft during a meeting scheduled for April 17. The proposal will then be finalised after several more meetings with the stakeholders, he added.

The party conditionally agreed to some executive branch reforms. While supporting a model where the prime minister is "first among equals" in the cabinet rather than holding absolute authority, they insisted that the president's advisory role should be non-binding.

Moreover, it agreed that a person cannot hold the positions of PM and party chief at the same time.

For the judiciary, the NCP supported establishing an independent Supreme Court Secretariat. It agreed that the Supreme Judicial Council should have the authority to investigate the NCC when necessary.

Additionally, they suggested that the Supreme Court should consider previous annual confidential reports and records of appointments to profit-based positions when reviewing judicial appointments.

Sarwar Tushar, coordinator of the NCP's reform coordination committee, said his party emphasised that most constitutional reforms should be implemented either through a constituent assembly or a dual function parliament that first serves as a constituent assembly before transitioning into the legislature.

"Our party found this method to be the most logical and precise approach," Tushar, also the joint convenor of the NCP, said.

Regarding legislative structure, the NCP accepted the proposal for a 400-seat parliament, with 300 seats open to all candidates and 100 reserved exclusively for women.

They also agreed with the recommendation to establish an upper house, where 100 members would be elected based on the proportion of total votes received, while five would be nominated by the president.

However, the party suggested that all candidates for the upper house should be announced before the lower house elections and that vote percentages should be rounded up to whole numbers

if they exceed 0.5 percent.

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