

Bangladesh, China vow to speed up cooperation

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and China yesterday expressed a shared commitment to transform recent high-level discussions into actionable projects across a range of sectors, including infrastructure, trade, healthcare, education, and culture.

"Our top priority now is to move forward with the plans we discussed during the China visit," Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus said at a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen at the State Guest House Jamuna, where they reviewed the outcomes of Yunus's recent visit to China and outlined the next steps for accelerating Bangladesh-China cooperation.

"We want to make sure the momentum is not lost," the chief adviser's deputy press secretary Apurba Jahangir quoted him as saying.

The Chinese ambassador echoed Yunus's sentiment: "This is also our top priority. We had one of the highest-level agenda meetings in China, and we do not want to wait another two to three years just to sign agreements -- we want to implement them quickly."

One of the topics discussed was the development of the Mongla and Anowara economic zones.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



The photo shows a makeshift charging rig for battery-run autorickshaws on a pavement in the Tejgaon Industrial Area. This dodgy setup poses a risk of electrical short circuits, potentially leading to accidents involving pedestrians. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Hold polls only after

FROM PAGE 1

He said the EC should depend on the National Consensus Commission's full report on electoral reform.

Nasiruddin said once finalised, the government would forward the final report to relevant constitutional bodies, and the NCP expects full implementation. "We discussed the electoral system in our meeting with the commission and insisted that the final report be enforced."

He emphasised that "every page, every word" of the reform report must be translated into rules and policies to guide the next election. "The CEC agreed--there must be alignment with the commission. Without it, trust is impossible."

He also criticised past manipulation of elections, stating, "For the last 15 years, the process has been engineered. We want that to end in a new Bangladesh."

The NCP has called for an investigation and accountability for those involved in the last three national elections.

Nasiruddin said, "The Awami League had pushed the country and its institutions into a fascist framework, stripping the people of their right to vote. The Election Commission also shares responsibility for this. Those who contested in the past three elections, as well as the EC officials and staff involved, must be investigated through proper procedures and brought to justice--so that no constitutional institution or individual can side with any political party in the future."

He also said that over the past 15 years, people's right to vote was taken away. Through fraud and manipulation, Bangladesh was transformed into a fascist structure and the Election Commission played a significant role behind that fascist framework.

"We want a new, transparent electoral path for Bangladesh."

NCP'S NINE DEMANDS

The NCP leader said that they have raised nine demands with the CEC. These are: candidates must submit their nomination papers in person, certification of the election by the EC within 48 hours, investigation of candidates' affidavits to verify their authenticity, amendments to the code of conduct and expenditure rules, stopping loan defaulters from participating in elections, cancellation of candidacy if false information is found in the affidavit, and ensuring they cannot hold office even if elected, ensuring voting rights for expatriates, extending the deadline for political party registration, and monitoring political parties to ensure they practice internal democratic processes.

He also said that if these demands are not implemented, it will not be possible to participate in the election or exercise the right to vote.

EC EXTENDS PARTY'S REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Yesterday, the EC extended the deadline for new political party registration by two months, setting it for June 22. The original deadline was April 20.

"Until Thursday, seven parties applied for registration and 20 others sought an extended deadline. Under these circumstances, the time for securing registration has been extended," EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters at the EC headquarters yesterday.

He said the parties seeking registration need to apply within the extended deadline, fulfilling the related legal requirements and exhausting the procedures.

BNP stands against floor crossing

FROM PAGE 1

the Declaration of Independence – into the constitution's preamble and fundamental principles.

During the talks, the BNP voiced strong reservations over the proposal to reduce the parliamentary term from five years to four.

It also objected to a proposal to change article 70 that would allow MPs to vote against their party on all matters except money bills.

Instead, the BNP suggested allowing MPs to participate in discussions -- without voting -- on issues like constitutional amendments, confidence motions, and national security.

The party disagreed with the commission's recommendation for proportional representation in a proposed upper house of parliament, insisting that any decision on a bicameral legislature must come through open debate in an elected parliament.

The BNP reiterated its support for restoring the constitutional provision that mentions "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah".

On fundamental rights, Salahuddin said the state must not promise rights it cannot realistically ensure, warning that an overly broad definition could create economic burdens.

Despite major disagreements, the BNP found common ground on some issues. It agreed to incorporate the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice -- as reflected in

the party's recommendation for proportional representation in a proposed upper house of parliament, insisting that any decision on a bicameral legislature must come through open debate in an elected parliament.

The BNP called for reforms to the caretaker government system, focusing on the method of appointing the chief adviser.

Party leaders argued that a more neutral and credible appointment process is necessary to restore public trust in electoral oversight.

The party strongly emphasised reforming the Election Commission, demanding greater legal and institutional safeguards to ensure its independence and capacity to hold free and fair elections.

In addition, the BNP advocated for the strengthening of local government bodies, stressing the need for genuine decentralisation backed by sufficient resources and authority.

On judicial reforms, the party proposed separating the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court and suggested forming a separate constitutional court to deal with constitutional matters exclusively.

Alleging that the Anti-Corruption Commission is often used for political purposes, the BNP demanded its full

autonomy. Similar calls were made for the depoliticisation of the police and civil administration to ensure neutrality and professionalism in state institutions.

The party maintained that while some reforms would require constitutional amendments, many could be implemented through ordinary legislations passed by parliament.

It stressed the importance of political consensus in driving any successful reform agenda.

The meeting, which lasted from 11:00am to 5:30pm, was attended by five BNP representatives: Nazrul Islam Khan and Salahuddin Ahmed of the Standing Committee; party chairperson's adviser Md Ismail Jobullah; lawyer Ruhul Quddus Kajol; and former secretary Abu Md Moniruzzaman Khan.

Representing the commission were its Vice-Chairman Prof Ali Riaz, Justice Md Emdadul Haque, Badul Alam Majumdar, Iftekharuzzaman, and Safar Raj Hossain. Monir Haider, special assistant to the chief adviser (Consensus), moderated the session.

Party sources said that while the BNP showed flexibility on minor issues, it held firm on matters of constitutional significance.

Though the party aligned with the commission on broad democratic principles, deep disagreements remain over procedural and implementation frameworks, setting the stage for further political negotiations.

To overcome these challenges, the formation of a permanent and effective Local Government Commission could create opportunities for the development, decentralisation, and quality enhancement of local government services, it added.

The full report says the term "local administration" should be replaced with "local government" in the constitution.

It recommends that article 119(i) of the constitution include a new line, "The Election Commission shall independently conduct elections of local [government] councils." This would enable the EC to constitutionally schedule local elections, without having to wait for the government's request.

The reform commission proposed a parliamentary model for all local government institutions across the country.

Like the national government, local governments can adopt a parliamentary system. In local elections, only members or councillors would be directly elected by public vote. Subsequently, executive positions such as mayor or chairman would be elected internally by the respective councils, says the report.

If the proposals are implemented, holding the local government elections would take one or two months. Currently, it takes around 225 days, says Prof Tofail.

VIOLATION OF EASTER TRUCE Russia, Ukraine trade blame

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday Russian forces were making a pretence of a one-day Easter ceasefire announced by President Vladimir Putin, continuing overnight attempts to inflict frontline losses on Ukraine.

Russia's defence ministry, however, said that Ukraine had broken the ceasefire more than a thousand times, inflicting damages to infrastructure and causing civilian deaths.

The ministry said that Ukrainian forces had shot at Russian positions 444 times while it had counted more than 900 Ukrainian drone attacks. It said the border districts of the Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod regions have been attacked.

Putin, hours before heading to an Orthodox Easter service late on Saturday, ordered his forces to "stop all military activity" along the front line in the three-year-old war until midnight Moscow time (2100 GMT) yesterday.

The gesture followed a US announcement that it could abandon peace talks within days unless Moscow and Kyiv showed they were serious about negotiating.

Local polls too should be held under caretaker

FROM PAGE 1

that include handing over the tasks of 30 government offices to the zila parishads in the three hill tract districts.

The Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs should be the overseeing authority of the local government bodies of the three districts.

In the long run, there should be city governments in Dhaka and Chattogram. The city government system can be tested in the nine city corporations.

The report says local government institutions are facing challenges and struggling to maintain effective coordination with the central government. Administrative complexities, financial constraints, and legal ambiguities often hinder the efficiency of local government institutions.

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The commission recommended handing over the upazila health complexes and union health and family welfare centres, along with their manpower and resources, to the respective upazila parishads and union parishes.

It proposed transferring the 14,000 community clinics, most of which are nearly non-functional, to the union health and family welfare centres. Union parishads and upazila parishads may also be given the authority to oversee the primary education system.

It proposed that one-third of the VAT should be allocated to the local government bodies. Only union parishads, municipalities and city corporations will be entitled to collect taxes.

Court accepts charge sheet

FROM PAGE 1

On March 8, the child's mother filed a case with Magura Sadar Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act on charges of rape and causing injury through rape. The child's sister's husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law, and mother-in-law were named as accused.

The child died while undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka on March 13. That evening, the child's body was taken to Magura.

After the first funeral, an agitated crowd vandalised and set fire to the house of the child's sister's in-laws.

On March 15, the child's sister's father-in-law had given a confessional

statement in court that he had raped the child alone.

Magura Senior Judicial Magistrate Sabayasachi Roy had recorded the statement under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In his statement, the man said that on the morning of March 6, he found the child alone in his younger son's room and attempted to rape and murder her.

On April 7, the DNA report found evidence of the involvement of the main accused (the sister's father-in-law) in the incident, confirmed Md Rezaul Haque, the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna.

All of the accused are currently in jail.

Govt to seek US sanction waiver

FROM PAGE 1

As much as \$900 million has been on hold since 2022 in the central bank's escrow account, a third-party special deposit fund to hold the assets of a transaction temporarily. The assets are only released when all terms of the agreement have been met.

The finance ministry and the ministry of science and technology will be applying for the waiver from the US Treasury within a couple of weeks, The Daily Star has learnt from people informed with the proceedings.

A meeting will be held with the US Treasury on the sidelines of the WB IMF spring meetings that begin today in Washington DC.

Before leaving for Washington DC, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told reporters that the concerned officials would hold discussions with the US treasury on the Rooppur plant's payment issues.

Since getting the sanctions, Russia has been asking for the payments -- even in roubles -- almost every month.

Bangladesh has also been trying alternative options like sending payments through a bank in China. But that went nowhere as banks in China did not agree with the proposals.

Due to the pandemic, construction work for the power plant had been delayed, which resulted in penalties. Besides, due to the payment obstacles, the penalty for late payment was activated.

"We are searching for alternatives," he said.

As per the loan agreements signed with Russia for the power plant,

UN official expressed support for this request.

The chief adviser assured that all Bangladeshi peacekeepers undergo thorough UN vetting procedures. He welcomed deeper collaboration with the UN and international partners on training and accountability to enhance human rights compliance.

Lacroix informed the chief adviser that a Bangladeshi delegation, led by the foreign adviser, will participate in the upcoming UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference in Berlin, scheduled for May 13-14 this year.

While discussing regional security, the chief adviser expressed concern over the ongoing conflict in Myanmar, which is causing cross-border shelling, civilian casualties, and disruptions to life along the Naf River border.

He warned that continued instability in Myanmar could escalate further, posing serious regional security risks. He urged intensified international engagement to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

Referring to UN Secretary General António Guterres's recent visit to Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, Yunus said the visit had renewed hope among refugees for a safe and dignified return to

Myanmar.

The chief adviser reiterated Bangladesh's readiness to deploy additional troops and police as required.

He noted the country's pledge of five units at the Rapid Deployment Level under the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS).

He also advocated for greater Bangladeshi representation in peacekeeping leadership roles at both UN headquarters and in the field. The