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BNP welcomes army stance on polls, democracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said yesterday that his party appreciates the army's stance on holding elections without delay and restoring democracy in the country.

"When the Bangladesh Army speaks of democracy and elections, nothing could be more welcoming than that."

He made the remarks while addressing the 30th founding anniversary celebration programme of the Dhaka Reporters' Unity on its premises in the capital.

Khasru said that whereas armies are known for seizing power, the chief of the Bangladesh Army is calling for a democratic nation run by a government elected by the people.

"I've never heard any army chiefs say such things before."

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A traffic police constable resorts to using a piece of rope stretched across the street to halt traffic, as drivers often ignore his hand signals. The photo was taken yesterday near the High Court in the capital.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Non-native plants, animals cost Europe over \$1.5tn

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Non-native plants and animals cost Europe over \$1.5 trillion in the last six decades, according to a new study, indicating the global economic impact of such species could be several times higher than previously thought.

The research, published in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, assessed data on 162 invasive species and their potential damage to various countries.

Previous studies have shown that invasive alien species pose a threat to biodiversity, ecosystem services, and economies. By one estimate, they have contributed to 60 percent of recorded global extinctions.

However, previous estimates of the monetary impact of invasive species were based on only a few documented costs from a limited range of countries, researchers said.

The latest study combines the estimated costs, including damage to agriculture, at the national level for 162 invasive species with models of where the species are distributed around the world.

The analysis maps the impact of species such as the Asian tiger mosquito, the tree of heaven and the American bullfrog, and estimates monetary costs incurred by their spread in other countries, including 78 nations for which no data was previously available such as Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Cyprus, and Egypt.



Hamas agrees to US proposal on Gaza truce

Says Palestinian official; 52 killed in Israeli strikes

AGENCIES

Hamas has agreed to a proposal by US special envoy Steve Witkoff for a Gaza ceasefire, a Palestinian official close to the group told Reuters yesterday, paving the way for a possible end to the war.

The new proposal, which sees the release of ten hostages and 70 days of truce, was received by Hamas through mediators.

"The proposal includes the release of ten living Israeli hostages held by Hamas in two groups in return for a 70-day ceasefire and a partial withdrawal from the Gaza Strip," the source said.

The proposal also sees the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners by Israel, including hundreds of those serving lengthy prison terms. There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Meanwhile, rescuers said devastating Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip killed at least 52 people yesterday, 33 of them in a school turned shelter, as the head of a US-backed foundation set to supply aid in Gaza quit unexpectedly.

The civil defence agency said many of the casualties at the school in Gaza City were children, while the Israeli military said the site was housing "key terrorists".

World leaders meeting in Spain called for an end to the

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FY26 BUDGET 22% of revenue to go towards interest payment

Extra Tk 8,000cr for interest payment this fiscal year

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ASIFUR RAHMAN

As much as Tk 122,000 crore is expected to be allocated for interest payment in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which is about 22 percent of the total revenue budget.

The revenue budget is likely to be Tk 560,000 crore, according to the draft estimation by the finance ministry.

Not only in the upcoming budget, the interest payment against local and foreign loans would increase in this fiscal year's revised budget too as a result of a large number of outstanding debts, interest rate hikes and the devaluation of taka against the dollar.

The allocation for interest payment is likely to be revised upwards by about 7 percent to Tk 121,500 crore this fiscal year, according to the draft estimation.

In the first six months of fiscal 2024-25, the interest payment rose 27 percent year-on-year to Tk 75,902 crore.

Interest payments against external loans would continue to soar in the coming years thanks to Bangladesh's graduation from the least-developed country bracket

INTEREST PAYMENT OVER THE YEARS (in Tk cr)

*allocation. **probable

**FY26	122,000
*FY25	113,500
FY24	114,590
FY23	92,083
FY22	77,770

and elevated benchmark interest rates in advanced economies, according to the finance division's Medium-Term Macroeconomic Policy Statement.

Usually, interest payments commence once the loan is utilised. But after the pandemic, the government has been taking large amounts of budget support every year, which is disbursed immediately and the repayments kick in.

Many mega projects have been

completed and some are nearing completion. The principal amount of the loans for those projects are yet to be repaid but the interest payments have been paid.

As the per capita income has increased in recent years, the multilateral and bilateral lenders have increased the interest rate. Many of them have been lending at a market-based interest rate, which is high enough.

Take the case of Japan, which

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A boy sorts through his belongings amid the debris at the Fahmi Al-Jarjawi School in Gaza City yesterday, following an Israeli strike.

\$1B SOFT LOAN

Japanese cabinet to decide soon Says its ambassador

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japan has been and will continue to be a faithful development partner of Bangladesh, Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Saita Shinichi has said ahead of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus' four-day Tokyo visit.

Shinichi said Japan is eagerly awaiting a cabinet decision on Bangladesh's request for \$1 billion soft loan as budgetary support.

"We are really expecting the agreement as soon as possible and the official announcement to be celebrated by the two leaders," Shinichi told a press briefing at the embassy yesterday.

Yunus will be leaving Dhaka for Tokyo early tomorrow. During his visit, he will present the keynote at the 30th Nikkei Forum Future of Asia. Asian political and business leaders and academics will join the conference.

On May 30, he will hold a bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, acting foreign secretary Md Ruhul Alam Siddique told a separate media briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday.

During the visit, the chief adviser will hold meetings with Japan Bangladesh Parliamentary Friendship League President Taro Aso, Nippon Foundation President Yohei Sasakawa, JICA President Tanaka Akihiko, JETRO President Kimura Fukunari, he said.

Yunus will attend three seminars -- on human resources development and recruitment of Bangladeshi

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WOMEN'S REFORM REPORT

HC rejects writ challenging some recommendations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday summarily rejected a writ petition challenging the legality of several recommendations made in the Women's Affairs Reform Commission's report.

The bench of Justice Fatema Najib and Justice Sikder Mahmudur Razi dismissed the petition, terming it "premature" as the recommendations have not yet been implemented.

On May 19, writ petitioner Rowshan Ali, a Supreme Court lawyer, argued that the proposals in chapters three, four, six, 10, 11 and 12 of the commission's report conflict with Islamic Shariah, offend religious sentiments, and are inconsistent with the constitution.

He urged the court to direct the formation of a committee comprising constitutional experts, Islamic scholars and civil society representatives to review and advise on any future reforms concerning religious and family laws.

Rowshan filed the petition as a public interest litigation on May 4, stating that chapter 11 of the report proposes equal inheritance rights for men and women, which he claimed contradicts provisions in the Holy Quran.

He also objected to the report's recommendation to ban polygamy, arguing that it is a permitted provision under Islamic law. Referring to article 41 of the constitution, he contended that such a restriction would infringe on the right to freely practise religion.

Appearing for the state, Additional Attorney General Aneek R Haque opposed the petition and urged the court to reject it, arguing that the commission's recommendations were still at a premature stage and that any cause of action would arise only if the government decides to adopt them.

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Female teacher made OSD 'for advocating equal rights'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Nadira Yasmin, assistant professor of Bangla at Narsingdi Government College, was made Officer on Special Duty (OSD) yesterday.

The decision came just a day after Hefazat-e-Islam and other religious groups protested over a magazine she edits and publishes, and demanded her removal from the college within 48 hours.

She has been attached to Sathkhira Government College, according to a circular from the education ministry issued yesterday. The circular shows Yasmin was among five teachers transferred in the latest order – three of whom, including her, were made OSD.

Unlike regular transfers, where teachers are assigned new roles, OSD postings usually remove individuals from active duties while keeping them on the payroll.

Though not officially a punishment, the move is widely seen as a disciplinary measure.

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