

## Another 22 pushed in by BSF

STAR REPORT

At least 22 people were pushed into Bangladesh allegedly by India's Border Security Force (BSF) through various border points in Kurigram and Dinajpur early yesterday.

Nine of them were identified as Bangladeshi nationals, said officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). The identities of the remaining 13 could not be confirmed till the filing of this report around 9:00pm last night.

Lt Col Mehedi Imam, commanding officer of Kurigram's BGB-15 Battalion, said they detained the nine Bangladeshis shortly after they were pushed in by BSF through the Kashipur-Dharmapur border near International Main Pillar No-943 in Phulbari upazila around 3:30am.

"After verifying their identities, we handed them over to police. All of them are residents of Phulbari upazila. They had crossed the border into India in search of work and had been living there," he added.

Phulbari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdul Salam said a general diary was filed and the detainees were later handed over to their families

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus presents former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad a copy of "Art of Triumph", a book on July uprising graffiti, at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

## Restore democracy

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nationalism in this country."

Addressing the discussion virtually from London, Tarique came down heavily on the interim administration. The government has created uncertainty in the state and politics as it is yet to announce a specific date for the national election, even after 10 months in office, he said.

This has virtually brought economic activities in the country to a standstill, he added.

Tarique reiterated the demand that the election be held by December. "The people are ready to vote for their preferred candidates and establish an accountable government. But the interim government seems to be failing to understand the aspirations of the people."

He stated that while the government assumed power under exceptional circumstances following a mass uprising and may be deemed legitimate, it remains entirely unaccountable.

"Due to the absence of a stable, elected government with a fixed term, the country is not receiving the desired investments. The media, citing

business organisations, have reported that hundreds of industrial plants have already shut down for various reasons. Many more factories are on the verge of closure," he said.

Tarique said the public has no direct communication with the advisers, resulting in many advisers being unaware of the problems, prospects, and hardships faced by people from different classes and professions.

"Some may be trying to identify and solve people's problems by sitting in offices and reviewing files. But if all problems could be solved solely through administration-dependent file work without direct communication with the people, then surely there would be no need for political parties or politics."

He said every political party in favour of democracy has already submitted written reform proposals to the interim government, and no political party has any major objections to the reforms.

"But, there is certainly an objection to the government's unnecessary delay in implementing the reforms."

Standing Committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Abdul

Moyeen Khan, Salahuddin Ahmed, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and Major (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed also spoke at the event, which was virtually presided over by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

A documentary featuring a brief biography of Zia was showed at the event.

Fakhru urged party leaders and activists to remain united. "The struggle to achieve democracy must be intensified," he said, alleging "a conspiracy to depoliticise the country".

Salahuddin said that the reforms upon which consensus is reached can be implemented within a week or a month. If the government is unable to do so, and if the responsibility is given to BNP, the party will carry it out, he added.

On the chief adviser, Salahuddin said he speaks less at home but gives more interviews while abroad.

Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin said while the army chief emphasised the need for an election by December, the civilian government does not speak about polls.

## Rain, tidal surge flood coastal areas

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During high tide in Cox's Bazar's Maheshkhali, Danu Miah, 42, of Ghotibhanga, drowned around 1:00pm, said Hedayet Ullah, upazila nirbahi officer.

Meanwhile, in Noakhali, waterway communication with the island upazila of Hatiya had to be suspended since the morning due to excessive tidal surges and flooding.

Nearly 15,000 people in Nijhum Dwip and other chars have been stranded, with numerous fish farms, homes, and roads submerged, said Md Alauddin, upazila nirbahi officer of Hatiya.

A 10-metre section of the embankment along the Sangu river in the Juidondi union of Chattogram collapsed in the morning, flooding low-lying areas, while another 150 metres remain at risk.

Barna Haque, sub-divisional engineer at the Bangladesh Water Development Board's (BWDB) Anwara sub-division, said, "We have mobilised teams with geo-bags and necessary equipment. Repair work will commence once the tide recedes."

In Barishal, all internal waterway routes have been suspended since yesterday morning.

"All rivers are flowing above the danger level, and several low-lying areas have been submerged," said Tajul Islam, sub-assistant engineer of BWDB in Barishal.

In Patuakhali, heavy rainfall has submerged low-lying areas, and due to the rough seas, all fishing boats have been ordered to remain close to the coast.

Delwar Hossain, district relief and rehabilitation officer, said that 20 villages

in Rangabali and 10 villages in Kalaopara have been submerged after some parts of the embankments collapsed.

Thousands of residents got stranded in knee-to-waist deep water in the upazilas, with many reportedly going without food or drinking water.

In Bhola, low-lying areas have been inundated due to high tide.

According to administration sources, water breached the embankment at the Dhoroni sluice point in Tajumuddin, flooding surrounding areas. Meanwhile, in Monpura upazila, parts of Kaltali union and areas outside the protection embankments have been submerged.

The tidal surge reached up to seven feet above normal in some places, flooding vast lowlands and char areas in both upazilas.

Tajumuddin Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Shubho Debnath confirmed that a 10-metre stretch of the ring embankment was damaged. However, the BWDB has promptly begun repair works.

"Water levels rose up to seven feet in some areas. Apart from the loss of three cows and some other domestic animals, no major damages have been reported so far," the UNO said.

In Barguna, the gangways at both ends of Bouchokti Ferry Ghat were submerged, causing significant difficulties for commuters. Floodwaters have already stranded over a hundred families in the area.

In Cox's Bazar, several low-lying areas of Maheshkhali and Kutubdia have been flooded, while many areas in Dakkhinpata and Golachipa on Saint

Martin's Island have been submerged under seawater.

"Many sweet water ponds on the island have been flooded by seawater, adding misery to the dwellers," said Joyнал Abedin, a beach guard with the district administration.

Meanwhile, the suspension of inland water transport yesterday caused suffering to passengers who arrived at the river ports braving heavy rain.

BIWTA halted the movement of all small and large water vessels, carrying both passengers and cargo, from 3:00pm.

The forecast bulletin issued by the Bangladesh Meteorological Department warned that the depression is likely to move northward, accompanied by the southwest monsoon.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) has issued a flood warning and stated that the Sari-Gowain River in Sylhet, Jadukata in Sunamganj, Manu and Dhalai in Moulvibazar, Khwai in Habiganj, Someshwari in Netrakona, and Muhuri in Feni may exceed danger levels in the next two days.

Meanwhile, the FFWC has also opened a control room to monitor the flood situation.

Sarder Uday Raihan, executive engineer of the centre, said the current situation is expected to continue for two to three more days. "While some areas may experience temporary flooding, it is unlikely to be long-lasting," he added.

[Our reporters and correspondents from Sylhet, Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, Barishal, Patuakhali, and Noakhali contributed to the report]

## Reforms first priority, then trials, polls

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The Tokyo event, titled Future of Asia, was attended by the Asian political and business leaders, think tanks and top officials of regional and multilateral agencies.

Noting that some politicians want elections in December this year, the chief adviser said, "We don't want to leave the country with the old institutions remaining as it is. If we need a good job at the reforms, we have to wait for six months more [for the election]."

"There are opinions that let's get the election done, but it is not all, just one particular party."

The BNP has been demanding the election by December this year while Prof Yunus has said on multiple occasions that polls would be held between December this year and June next year, depending on the extent of reforms.

The National Citizen Party, led by student leaders who spearheaded the mass uprising that led to the fall of the Awami League regime, has been calling for robust reforms and trials of perpetrators before a national election.

Answering another question at the event yesterday, Yunus said he was not a politician and would not run for office.

Addressing a session on "Asian Challenges in a Turbulent World" at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, he said, "The transformational change by a student-led mass uprising in Bangladesh is a chance to correct the wrongs and realise the dream of a fairer society."

The interim government is working hard to ensure justice, equality, freedom, and dignity of people, and prepare for a free and fair general election, he said.

Regarding global challenges, the Nobel laureate said conflicts were erupting in Asia and beyond.

"Wars and man-made conflicts are

destroying the lives and livelihood of thousands in Ukraine, Gaza, and in the countries in south and southeast Asia."

In Myanmar, a civil war has taken a brutal turn, and the recent earthquake has pushed an already deep humanitarian crisis into greater darkness, he said.

"Very recently, our two neighbours have fought a short but expensive war. Regrettably, we are spending billions in fighting wars, leaving millions of our people starving or struggling for basic needs."

He thanked the leaders of the two countries – India and Pakistan – for agreeing to a ceasefire, and hoped for continued peace, stability, and peaceful coexistence in South Asia.

Millions around the world are being displaced by climate change, he said. "The rise of trade restrictions continues to challenge the very foundation of the free trade system."

"Economic inequalities are widening and trust is declining between nations, within societies, and even between citizens and institutions."

"In recent times, we witnessed such divisions, discontent, and instability in Bangladesh, Republic of Korea that led to regime changes."

"...I believe Asia has an opportunity – perhaps even a responsibility – to show a different path. A path of peace, of dialogue, of inclusive growth. Not just growth in numbers, but growth in people's well-being, in trust, in hope."

"We need to shift our focus from individual profits to collective wellbeing, from short-term gain to long-term vision.... People are not born to suffer but with limitless potential and need to have the right opportunities."

He said despite multiple domestic challenges, Bangladesh was contributing to global peace and

AZHARUL'S ACQUITTAL

## 'Shibir behind the attacks'

Says leftist student alliance; Shibir refutes allegation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Gonotantrik Chhatra Jote yesterday alleged that Islami Chhatra Shibir activists were behind the recent attacks on its members in Chattogram and Rajshahi.

The Jote, a coalition of left-leaning student organisations, also demanded punishment for the attackers, who assaulted their activists during protests against the acquittal of Jamaat-e-Islami leader ATM Azharul Islam in crimes against humanity cases.

"In recent days, there have been attacks on democracy, the judiciary, and the spirit of the Liberation War. This is deeply worrying and shameful," said Annie Chowdhury, central vice-president of the Gonotantrik Chhatra Council, at a press briefing at the Chattogram Metropolitan Journalists' Union auditorium.

She blamed Shibir and demanded that the perpetrators be brought to justice.

According to media reports, the Jote's leaders and activists were attacked by members of "Anti-Shahbagh Mancha" during a rally in front of the Chattogram Press Club on Wednesday, a day after a similar attack on the group's Rajshahi unit. At least

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## NSC cancels Faruque's BCB directorship

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ouster of the Awami League regime. NSC's decision was the climax to day-long drama centered around the BCB presidency.

The day began with former Bangladesh cricketer Aminul Islam Bulbul telling The Daily Star that he has accepted a proposal from the NSC to succeed Faruque as the next BCB president.

This confirmation from Bulbul came a day after Faruque was reportedly asked to no longer continue as the BCB president by sports advisor Asif Mahmud.

Faruque was still determined to carry on as board president, as he demanded a "valid reason" for him to step away.

"I'm not thinking about stepping down for the time being. Nobody has given me a valid reason to do so," Faruque told The Daily Star on Thursday.

"Why should I leave when others continue in their positions? First, I need to know the actual reason. Second, I didn't take this role on my own, I was selected. Since I was brought here, I deserve to know what my crime is and why I should resign," he added.

In the evening, it was learned that eight of the nine board directors – Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, Fahim Sinha, Mohammad Saiful Alam Swapon Chowdhury, Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, Mahbub Anam, Kazi Inam Ahmed, Manjur Alam and Mohammad Salahuddin – have sent a signed letter

of no confidence to NSC.

Akram Khan was the only board director who did not sign it.

The directors urged the NSC to take the necessary legal steps to cancel Faruque's directorship at the board, which would in turn make him ineligible to be the BCB president. Later, Faruque had told media that he was considering legal steps against the letter. Meanwhile, the drama surrounding the presidency is escalating the risk of an ICC suspension. The global cricket governing body has suspended Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka in the recent past citing government interference and it remains to be seen how ICC views what's currently happening in BCB.

## SC puts ball in EC's court

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Calling the protest part of a broader movement to "restore democracy," Ishraque warned that if the government fails to act, he would file contempt charges in the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court yesterday observed that the matter of Ishraque's mayoral status falls under the jurisdiction of the Election Commission (EC).

The Appellate Division made the observation while disposing of a petition seeking leave to appeal a High Court ruling that upheld both a Dhaka tribunal's decision and the EC's recognition of Ishraque as the duly elected mayor.

A seven-member bench of the Appellate Division, led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, issued the observation after hearing the petition filed by Md Mamunur Rashid, who had previously challenged both the tribunal and EC decisions in the High Court.

Following the observation, the EC held a three-hour meeting at its Agargaon headquarters.

After the meeting, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMMNasir Uddin told the reporters that a decision will

be made after reviewing the copy of the court's verdict.

"We have not yet received any verdict from the Appellate Division. Once we receive the copy of the judgment, we will examine the legal aspects and take the necessary steps accordingly."

Replying to a query, the CEC also said that no decision can be made "based on media headlines".

The current term of the DSCC expires on June 1.

On March 27, Judge Md Nurul Islam of Dhaka's First Joint District Judge and Election Tribunal annulled the 2020 DSCC election results and declared Ishraque the winner, directing the EC to issue a gazette within ten days. The EC complied on April 27, officially announcing Ishraque – son of former Dhaka city mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka – as mayor.

Since then, the matter of Ishraque's oath-taking has been shuffled between the EC, local government division, law ministry, High Court, and, most recently, the Appellate Division.

Meanwhile, in a show of support, DSCC staff at all levels suspended work yesterday, bringing city services to a halt and causing widespread

inconvenience. The gates of Nagar Bhaban remained shut throughout the day as protesters marched inside the compound.

Ishraque, in the evening, visited the protest site to check on the well-being of his supporters.

"Some of the government's advisers have acted in a discriminatory manner toward me," he told the protesters.

"If they don't immediately arrange the oath-taking ceremony, it will be clear that the interim government is acting in contempt of the highest court and the Appellate Division," he warned. "The movement will escalate with public backing if our demand continues to be ignored."

He said the Local Government Division must implement the court order and arrange the oath ceremony immediately.

"Otherwise, we will seek contempt proceedings in the Supreme Court," he said.

Addressing the crowd, Ishraque said, "I am grateful to you all. Please keep your trust in me. This fight is part of the larger struggle to restore democracy and secure the people's right to vote."