

UN scales back global aid plan

Blames ‘deepest funding cuts ever’

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday it was drastically scaling back its global humanitarian aid plans because of the “deepest funding cuts ever” – leaving tens of millions of people facing dire straits.

The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said it was seeking \$29 billion in funding for 2025 compared to the \$44 billion originally requested in December, in a “hyper-prioritised” appeal.

Since US President Donald Trump returned to office in January, the United States – the world’s top donor – has heavily slashed foreign aid, causing havoc in the humanitarian sector across the globe.

Drastic US funding cuts have had dramatic consequences for emergency aid, vaccination campaigns and the distribution of drugs to fight AIDS.

Other major donor countries have also cut back their contributions in the face of an uncertain economic outlook.

“Brutal funding cuts leave us with

brutal choices,” OCHA chief Tom Fletcher said in a statement.

“All we ask is one percent of what you chose to spend last year on war. But this isn’t just an appeal for money – it’s a call for global responsibility, for human solidarity, for a commitment to end the suffering.”

In late April, while visiting a hospital in Kandahar in Afghanistan, Fletcher warned: “Cutting funding for those in greatest need is not something to boast about... The impact of aid cuts is that millions die.”

With 2025 nearly halfway through, the UN has received only \$5.6 billion out of the \$44 billion originally sought for this year – a mere 13 percent.

In total, the original plan covered more than 70 countries and aimed to assist nearly 190 million vulnerable people.

Even so, that plan acknowledged there were 115 million people the UN would not be able to reach.

“We have been forced into a triage of human survival,” Fletcher said yesterday.

The mathematics “is cruel, and the

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Donning masks, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and other members of National Consensus Commission meet at the Jamuna yesterday. The government has issued health guidelines following a recent spike in coronavirus cases.

PHOTO: CA’S PRESS WING

NCP almost ready to seek registration

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to be selected.

“We will submit our application to the Election Commission before the deadline. Our draft constitution has already been approved in a general meeting. Another meeting will be held this week to resolve some technical issues and finalise it,” said NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Fushar.

The EC will carry out field verification and make a decision based on its regulations once the application is submitted.

As per the EC registration criteria, a party must have a committee in at least 22 districts and 100 upazilas to apply for registration.

The NCP office cell said the party has so far formed committees in 30 districts, 120 upazilas, and two metropolises, along with 13 cells and 10 wings.

In early June, the party began announcing regional committees, starting with Dhaka’s two city units.

Prior to Eid, it announced upazila-level committees in Panchagarh Sadar, Tetulia, Debiganj, Boda, Kotalipara in Gopalganj, Lohagara and Kalia in Narail, Bancharampur and Sarail in Brahmanbaria, and Kachua in Bagerhat.

District-level committees have also been announced in Shoronkhola,

Tangail, Kurigram, Narayanganj, Jhalakathi, Meherpur, Barishal, Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Lalmonirhat, Narail, Chuadanga, and Munshiganj. After Eid, committees were declared in several upazilas in Bandarban, Bogura, Jamalpur, and Tangail.

To qualify for registration under existing laws, a new political party must have a functional central office and effective committees in at least one-third of the country’s administrative districts. It must also provide written endorsement by at least 200 registered voters from each of 100 upazilas or metropolitan police precincts.

The NCP is using the 15th floor of Rupayan Tower in the capital’s Banglamotor as its temporary central office. Leaders said the party will mention this address as its central office in the EC application, but it is actively searching for a new permanent headquarters in or near Katabon, Shahbagh, Segunbagicha, or Banglamotor areas.

For registration with the EC, a party must submit 10 documents, including the party’s constitution, electoral manifesto (if available), internal regulations (if available), party logo and flag, and names of all central committee

members.

The other necessary documents are bank account details and current balance, funding sources, a letter of authorisation for the applicant, a non-refundable treasury receipt for Tk 5,000 as the registration fee, and proof of meeting one of the three EC-set criteria.

While the first two EC-set criteria are for old parties that participated in polls before, the third is that the party has a central office, a central committee, offices in at least one-third of the administrative districts and 100 upazilas or metropolitan areas, and a minimum of 200 voters as its members in each upazila.

On March 10, the EC issued a public notice inviting applications for registration of new political parties, setting the initial deadline for April 20. The deadline was later extended to June 22 following appeals from several aspiring parties, including the NCP.

Emerging from student leaders who spearheaded the 2024 uprising and their platform for citizens, the NCP was launched on February 28. More than a dozen new political parties have surfaced since the July uprising that toppled the Awami League government on August 5 last year.

resumption of emergency civic services – including birth and death registration, inheritance certificates, and citizenship documentation – at ward offices.

Meanwhile, he accused the government of delaying his assumption of office as DSCC mayor, saying it is a politically motivated attempt to obstruct his legitimate authority.

Ishraque claimed the ruling government is intentionally preventing a BNP candidate from taking charge, instead installing its own administrator for political gain.

In response to a journalist’s question, Ishraque said that following the Appellate Division’s dismissal of a writ challenging his mayoral gazette, the existing DSCC administrator has “no legal standing.”

“A parallel administration has been operating illegally. I was elected by the people, and my position has been legally reaffirmed through the courts.”

“The government’s imposition of an administrator is not only unlawful but has also led to corruption within the city corporation.”

Ishraque crowns himself

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his supporters began a sit-in at Nagar Bhaban. At approximately 11:00am, Ishraque entered the building and held a discussion with officials from the waste management department at the DSCC conference room.

Organisers said the event aimed to promote a cleaner Dhaka and improve civic services. Ishraque, who was present as the chief guest, was greeted with floral bouquets and a crest.

A banner displayed behind the podium described him as the ‘Honourable Mayor, Dhaka South City Corporation’.

When asked about the use of the title “mayor”, Ishraque said, “We held a discussion with DSCC employees who’ve been delivering services to the public. I didn’t organise the event. If I’m invited and someone calls me the mayor, that’s their decision, not my claim. This is the people’s demand, and it has been upheld by the country’s highest court.”

“Those questioning the use of the title should educate themselves.

The gazette issued by the Election Commission clearly states that I’ve been declared the mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation.”

Meanwhile, current DSCC administrator Shahjahan Mia declined to comment on the matter when approached.

“I’m a government official; I will not make any comments,” he said. “All I can say is that Nagar Bhaban is locked, and my officers can’t work.”

Despite the lockdown, Ishraque announced a series of meetings with DSCC officials during his press conference.

“Since the start of our movement, we ensured uninterrupted essential services. With the recent spike in dengue cases, we are committed to reinforcing mosquito control efforts for the safety of Dhaka’s residents,” Ishraque said.

He also said he had met with over 70 conservancy inspectors yesterday and planned to sit with more than 70 ward secretaries today.

Ishraque further announced the

use his influence on Israel to agree to an immediate ceasefire with Iran in return for Tehran’s flexibility in nuclear negotiations, two Iranian and three regional sources told Reuters yesterday.

Israeli authorities said a total of seven missiles of the fewer than 100 fired by Iran overnight had landed in Israel. A military spokesman also said Israel had destroyed more than a third of Iran’s surface-to-surface missile launchers.

At least 100 people were wounded in Israel in the overnight blitz, part of a wave of attacks by Tehran in retaliation for Israel’s strikes targeting the nuclear and ballistic missile programmes of sworn enemy Iran.

The dangers of further escalation loomed over a meeting of G7 leaders in Canada, with Trump expressing hope on Sunday that a deal could be done but no sign of the fighting abating on a fourth day of war.

In total, 24 people in Israel have been killed so far in the Iranian missile attacks, all of them civilians. The death toll in Iran was already at least 224, with 90 percent of the casualties reported to be civilians, an Iranian health ministry spokesperson said.

The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz was leaving Southeast Asia after cancelling plans to dock in Vietnam, amid reports it is headed to the Middle East to boost the US presence.

Group of Seven leaders gathered in the Canadian Rockies on Sunday with

the Israel-Iran conflict expected to be a top priority.

Before leaving for the summit on Sunday, Trump was asked what he was doing to de-escalate the situation. “I hope there’s going to be a deal. I think it’s time for a deal,” he told reporters. “Sometimes they have to fight it out.”

In Washington, two US officials told Reuters that Trump had vetoed an Israeli plan in recent days to kill Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

When asked about the Reuters report, Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu told Fox News on Sunday: “There’s so many false reports of conversations that never happened, and I’m not going to get into that.”

China urged Iran and Israel to “immediately” take steps to reduce tensions.

Pakistani authorities have closed all major border crossings with Iran for pedestrian traffic amid escalating cross-border strikes between Iran and Israel.

The Kremlin said Russia remains ready to act as a mediator in the conflict, and Moscow’s previous proposal to store Iranian uranium in Russia remains on the table.

Oil prices edged down yesterday, after surging 7 percent on Friday, as the military strikes by Israel and Iran over the weekend avoided oil production and export facilities. While investors remain on edge, stock and currency markets in Asia were little moved.

Iran threatens to leave anti-nuke treaty

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for requiring them to forego atomic weapons and cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA.

Israel began bombing Iran last week, saying Tehran was on the verge of building a nuclear bomb. Iran has always said its nuclear programme is peaceful, although the IAEA declared last week that Tehran was in violation of its NPT obligations.

President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated yesterday that nuclear

weapons were against a religious edict by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran’s state media said that no decision on quitting the NPT had yet been made by parliament, while a parliamentarian said that the proposal was at the initial stages of the legal process.

Baghaei said that developments such as Israel’s attack “naturally affect the strategic decisions of the state,” noting that Israel’s attack had followed the

IAEA resolution, which he suggested was to blame.

“Those voting for the resolution prepared the ground for the attack,” Baghaei said.

Israel, which never joined the NPT, is widely assumed by regional governments to possess nuclear weapons, although it does not confirm or deny this.

“The Zionist regime is the only possessor of weapons of mass destruction in the region,” Baghaei said.

Yunus orders probe into last 3 elections

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discussions with all political parties,” said Prof Riaz.

The chief adviser said, “Everyone is eagerly waiting for the July Charter. I hope we will be able to present it before the nation by July.”

Sharing experience from his recent visit to the UK, the chief adviser told the meeting that Bangladeshi expatriates whoever met him in London have shown interest in the interim government’s reform process.

“Bangladeshi students were very much enthusiastic [about reforms]. They discussed with me in detail about the consensus commission’s activities and shared their views,” he said.

“Every place I’ve visited, expatriate Bangladeshis there asked me, ‘Will we be able to cast our votes in the next election?’”

The chief adviser said maximum effort has to be there to ensure voting right of the expatriate Bangladeshis, stressing the need for exploring

options, including postal ballot voting system.

In its report, the Electoral Reform Commission also recommended introducing methods to hold election commissioners accountable for failing to do their constitutional duties.

A section of police officials in December 2024 admitted that they were under pressure from higher authorities while performing duties during the last three national elections.

At a meeting with the reforms commission, they also alleged that there were “financial transactions” during the polls.

The Kazi Habibul Awal-led Election Commission had been at the centre of controversy as it held the most recent national polls in January last year, boycotted by the major opposition parties, including the BNP. The Awami League had to field dummy independent candidates, many of whom were AL leaders, to make the

polls look participatory.

The KM Nurul Huda-led election commission organised the December 2018 general election, with opposition parties alleging ballot-box stuffing the night before election day. In January 2019, the Jatiya Oikya Front alleged before the EC that between 30 and 60 percent of the votes were cast the night before.

The same month, Transparency International Bangladesh, in a study, found that stamping of ballots took place the night before election day in more than one centre in 33 of the 50 surveyed constituencies.

The Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad-led commission held a one-sided national election in January 2014, in which 153 lawmakers out of 300 were elected unopposed, as most of the opposition, including the BNP, boycotted the election.

The AL-led alliance won more than two-thirds majorities in all three national elections held under the Sheikh Hasina government.

Govt to form commission, enact law

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delegation, for consultation, visited human rights advocates and UN officials in Dhaka. Yesterday, it also met Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, and representatives from Maayer Daak, a platform for family members of victims of enforced disappearances.

Acting foreign secretary Ruhul Alam Siddique and the Chief Prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Tajul Islam were also visited by the delegation.

“I wish the United Nations were associated with our ongoing inquiry into the incidents of enforced disappearance. It will give the process some strength,” said Prof Yunus when Baranowska and Perez called on him at the State Guest House Jamuna, according to a press release.

The UN officials lauded the initiatives of Bangladesh’s interim government in addressing the issue of enforced disappearances, particularly the country’s accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), but emphasised that there was still much to be done.

The UN officials also praised the work and commitment demonstrated by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

The chief adviser expressed his satisfaction that Bangladesh could welcome the UN team here after more than a decade.

“We are extremely happy that you’re here after 13 years of waiting. We would like you to support the work of our commission and ... provide guidance and strength.”

Baranowska said since 2013, they had been trying to work on enforced disappearance in Bangladesh and

thanked the interim government for setting up the inquiry commission.

Baranowska said they would go outside Dhaka and hold meetings with victims, civil society, and political actors.

Meanwhile in the capital’s Gulshan, the UN working group, the UN Resident Coordinator Office, and Maayer Daak jointly organised a half-day discussion.

The event brought together over 80 family members of the disappeared, survivors of secret detentions, and international experts working on enforced disappearances, said a press release.

Victim families who have spent years searching for justice and answers shared deeply personal testimonies of trauma, loss, and resilience.

According to rights body Odhikar, at least 708 people were victims of enforced disappearance between 2009 and June 2024.

Families and survivors urged the UN working group to take an active role in conducting a comprehensive fact-finding mission on enforced disappearances in Bangladesh.

They also raised serious concerns about the impartiality and effectiveness of the current inquiry, especially given the destruction of evidence at detention sites and the troubling lack of access to the commission’s findings.

During the courtesy call on General Waker at the Army Headquarters, Baranowska expressed concern over allegations raised against a few army personnel who had previously served (in deputation) in various organisations, including the Rab, DGFI, and BGB.

In response, the army chief clarified that such personnel remain under the full command and administrative control of the respective organisations

during their deputation, according to an army notification.

The army chief also reaffirmed that the Bangladesh Army is committed to upholding justice and the protection of human rights and continues to extend full cooperation to national and international investigative processes, the notification added.

Meanwhile, the UN delegation discussed the ongoing efforts and challenges surrounding the prosecution of enforced disappearance cases when it met the ICT Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam.

“They wanted to understand how we handle cases of enforced disappearance, the current status of investigations and trials, the challenges we face, and the support we need,” Tajul told journalists after the meeting at his office.

Tajul added that the UN team assured them of full support and cooperation to ensure justice for victims.

“There are multiple issues at play, particularly ensuring the safety of victims and witnesses who come forward to testify. We discussed how the UN could assist us in those areas.”

He emphasised that witness protection remains a critical concern.

“Although laws exist, implementing them effectively remains a challenge. In some cases, witnesses may need to be relocated for their safety, even abroad – something the government alone cannot ensure. UN support is essential in this regard.”

The delegation also enquired about the logistical capacity of the ICT to reach victims who are unwilling or unable to approach the tribunal.

In response, Tajul proposed establishing outreach centres under the ICT’s investigation agency in various regions to reach victims more effectively, a move he said would also require UN assistance.