

EC will decide if AL can run in polls

Yunus tells BBC in interview

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said that whether the Awami League will be included in the elections or not is up to the Election Commission to decide.

In an interview with BBC World Service, aired on Saturday night, he also said, "We haven't banned Awami League yet. The activities of Awami League are banned temporarily."

Speaking to Rajini Vaidyanathan's "The Interview" on BBC, he said, "Recently, the resident coordinator of the UN in Dhaka said that inclusiveness does not mean the participation of a particular party, it means the participation of all the people."

He added that Bangladesh will use the international legal system to extradite Sheikh Hasina. "The trial of Sheikh Hasina has already begun."

Yunus also said as they do not have the power, they will use the international system to ensure her detention, adding that her stay in India is not an issue for the government, but her continued political activities are.

"It is her voice which creates problems. She is always addressing people in Bangladesh using airwaves. That creates tensions and creates hatred against the political party [Awami League]."

"We thought the sudden outburst of anger and killings ended on August 5 after she left. [We thought] The chapter is closed; let's move on. But for the Awami League it seems like it didn't end there. They want to continue. This creates a lot of tension within the country."

The chief adviser further said, "We do not want to look back on the horrible things they have done in terms of killing people, the disappearance of people, the massive amount of money they have taken away... one after another, the unbelievable cruelty of it. We thought we would deal with it gradually. But no, she reminds you - 'I am here, I will come back.'"

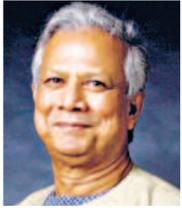
About whether India should do more to stop her, he replied, "You said it." Yunus also addressed allegations of repression of opposition political voices and the interim government "doing the same thing that the Awami League did".

"It will be a shame to say that [the interim government is doing the same thing]. If you compare the interim government with the Awami League government, I do not think you understand Bangladesh. That is absolutely not correct."

He also addressed questions about violence against minorities.

"We invite journalists to come and identify the incidents of [such] violence ... This is all fake news coming up one after another. Come and count them [the incidents], we are here," said Prof Yunus.

The BBC interviewed him during his four-day trip to London earlier this month.



US strikes Iran

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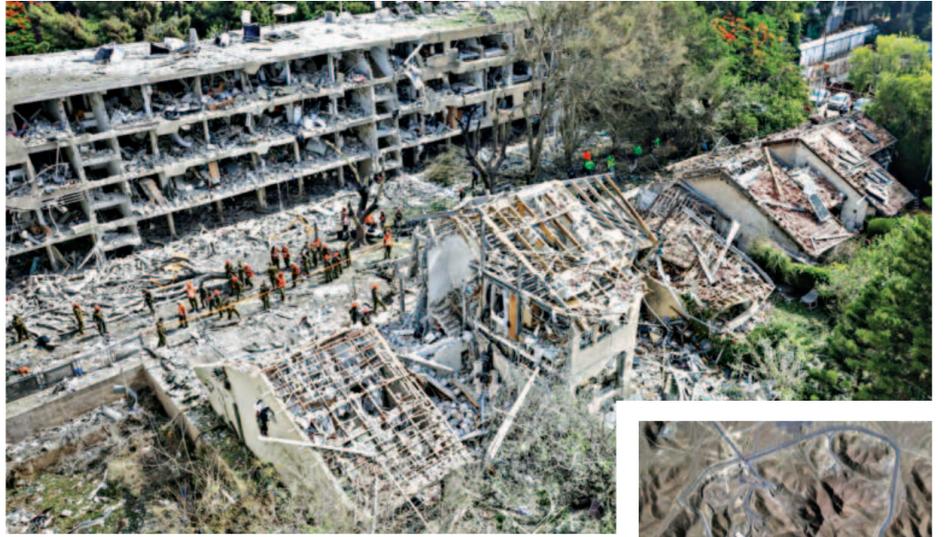
Earlier on Saturday, there were reports that US B-2 bombers - which carry so-called "bunker buster" bombs - were headed out of the United States.

According to Fox News, the B-2s took off from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri around midnight. While initial chatter suggested the aircraft were headed west toward Guam, its national security correspondent Jennifer Griffin noted the true flight path was likely east, directly toward Iran, in what appears to have been a "calculated deception".

Describing the complex operation, dubbed "Midnight Hammer," Joint Chiefs Chairman Dan Caine later said the "main strike package comprised of 7 B-2 Spirit bombers" flying 18 hours from the US mainland to Iran with multiple aerial refuellings.

The Fordow complex, buried deep beneath a mountain near Qom and considered the crown jewel of Iran's nuclear program, was the primary target. Natanz and Isfahan, both core to Iran's uranium enrichment infrastructure, were also hit.

According to Griffin, Israeli forces spent the past week systematically degrading Iran's air defences and missile systems, taking out surface-to-air batteries, command targets, and missile launchers. Since June 12, Israel has eliminated dozens of senior Iranian military officials and more than half of Iran's mobile ballistic missile capabilities, gaining what officials now describe as air superiority over Iranian skies.



Israeli security forces and first responders gather at the site of an Iranian strike that hit a residential neighbourhood in the Ramat Aviv area in Tel Aviv yesterday. Inset, the photos released by Maxar Technologies yesterday show Iran's Fordow site before and after US strikes.

PHOTO: AFP

missiles launched from US submarines were used in the attacks on the Natanz and Isfahan facilities. There is speculation that the missiles were shot from Ohio-class submarines, but there has been no confirmation.

Meanwhile, Israel's News 12 reported that Israel reportedly "knew for several days" that the US was planning to strike Iran. It also said that the two countries deliberately made it seem they were at odds to lull Iran into a false sense of security.

"They crossed a very big red line by attacking [Iran's] nuclear facilities," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul. He said he was heading to Russia for talks with President Vladimir Putin.

Foreign ministers from countries of the OIC yesterday urged Israel to end its "aggression" towards Iran, without mentioning the US strikes on the Islamic republic's nuclear sites.

In a step towards what is widely seen as Iran's most effective threat to hurt the West, its parliament approved a move to close the Strait of Hormuz, the entrance to the Gulf where nearly a quarter of the oil shipped around the world passes through narrow waters that Iran controls.

Iran's Press TV said closing the strait would require approval from the Supreme National Security Council, a body led by an appointee of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Attempting to choke off Gulf oil by closing the strait could send global oil prices skyrocketing, derail the world economy and invite almost certain conflict with the US Navy's massive Fifth Fleet, based in the Gulf and tasked with keeping it open.

Earlier, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said radiation system data and field surveys do not show signs of contamination or

danger to residents near the sites.

Another official said Fordow has "long been evacuated and has not suffered any irreversible damage".

The US strikes push the Middle East to the brink of a major new conflagration in a region already aflame for more than 20 months with wars in Gaza and Lebanon and a toppled dictator in Syria.

Netanyahu congratulated Trump on the strikes, saying that "America has been truly unsurpassed."

Hours after the strikes, US leadership tried to strike a conciliatory tone, saying the US was not at war with Iran.

"We're not at war with Iran - we're at war with Iran's nuclear program," the US vice-president told ABC.

The US defence chief also urged Iranian leaders to seek peace to avoid further attacks.

"We devastated the Iranian nuclear program," Pete Hegseth told a Pentagon press briefing, adding that the operation "did not target Iranian troops or the Iranian people."

"This mission was not, and has not, been about regime change," he added.

However, the Israeli military said the attacks against Iran will continue as they have more goals to achieve. It said it launched more attacks on Iran's defence structures yesterday.

Meanwhile, three areas of Israel, including coastal hub Tel Aviv, were hit yesterday morning during waves of Iranian missile attacks, with at least 23 people injured, according to rescue services and police.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the US strikes a "dangerous escalation in a region already on the edge."

Leading US Democrat Hakeem Jeffries said Trump did not seek Congressional approval for the strikes and risked US "entanglement in a potentially disastrous war in the Middle East."

Woman raped in Barguna, 3 sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A case was filed yesterday against three people accused of gang-raping a woman after she was lured into her friend's house in Barguna town on May 16.

The victim, a homemaker, filed the case with the Barguna Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal. The accused include her friend, in whose rented house the incident took place.

Judge Begum Laylatul Ferdous recorded the statement and directed the officer-in-charge of Barguna Sadar Police Station to treat it as a formal FIR, confirmed Special Public Prosecutor Advocate Ronjuara Sipu.

The accused are Mosammat Sima, 33; Ruhul Amin, 45, a worker at pharmacy; and Hadisur Rahman Noyon, 35, a pharmaceutical representative from Sirajganj.

According to the case statement, Sima allegedly uses her rented home for "immoral activities" involving girls of various ages.

Around 3:00pm on May 16, the survivor was passing by the house when Sima called her inside and led her to a room. Shortly after, Ruhul Amin and Hadisur entered. Sima told her to "obey the men" and left the room.

Ruhul then attempted to rape her. When she resisted, Hadisur allegedly used chloroform to render her unconscious. The two men then raped her alternately and filmed the assault on their phones.

In the case statement, the victim said, "After they made me unconscious using chloroform, they both raped me and I was left with severe injuries. They filmed the assault and Ruhul Amin threatened to release the video online if I told anyone."

She said she later went to the pharmacy where Ruhul works and pleaded with him to delete the footage. He instead demanded Tk 1.75 lakh. Her husband, who was in Dhaka at the time, advised her to take legal action, after which she filed the case.

BNP sues 3 ex-CECs

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and threats. It says many were arrested or harassed so that they could not take part in the polls.

The accused in the case, according to the BNP, were involved in irregularities during the three national elections.

Among them are former CECs Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, KM Nurul Huda, and Kazi Habibul Awal.

Also named in the case are ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan.

The list of accused includes former inspectors general of police Hasan Mahmud Khandker, Javed Patwary, and Shahidul Haque; former DMP commissioner Benazir Ahmed; former Special Branch chief Monirul Islam; and former chiefs of the National Security Intelligence and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence.

The BNP said these individuals were responsible for voter intimidation, and manipulation of the electoral process.

"Despite being in a constitutional institution, these suspects are accused of violating the constitution, violating the election code of conduct, illegally forcing electoral victories despite being government employees, concluding the voting process through intimidation, and falsely declaring members of parliament who did not receive the people's votes," said the complaint. 'ONE SIDED'

In the complaint, the BNP alleged that leaders and activists of the party and its allies were attacked and harassed during each of the past three elections.

The party also stated that when party leaders attempted to submit nomination papers, they were obstructed by Awami League supporters; however, the then Election Commission ignored the complaints.

The complaint said that the 2024 national polls, overseen by the Rakibuddin-led commission, were conducted in a "one-sided manner", disregarding public expectations and without reinstating voting rights through a democratic process.

It alleged that false cases were filed against BNP leaders and activists after

the party rejected the election and launched a movement demanding a caretaker government and Election Commission reforms.

In the complaint, the BNP said the 2018 election under the Nurul Huda-led commission was unfair and illegal, claiming that the CEC announced results for all 300 seats without following the constitution, which the party believes ignored the people's wishes and hurt democracy.

The party said the election had no real voters and was rejected by both the people of Bangladesh and the international community, adding that those responsible for the irregularities violated the law by taking away people's right to vote.

The BNP said it had submitted written complaints at the time, but no action was taken by election officials. It said ballot papers from that election should be investigated to find out the truth.

The complaint said the 2024 election was also "one-sided", as most parties rejected it while the Awami League continued with the polls using independent "dummy" candidates and offering a few seats to the Jatiya Party.

The Election Commission declared several Awami League and Jatiya Party members as winners and published the gazette by violating electoral rules to help the ruling party stay in power, it added.

The BNP demanded proper legal action, a full investigation into the roles of the CECs, commissioners, and other officials involved in the three elections. This move comes less than a week after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus ordered a probe into the role of previous election commissions in the irregularities surrounding the past three general elections. BNP leader Salahuddin said, "We demand justice for the rigging of three consecutive elections, and accountability of those responsible for the irregularities."

He added that CEC Nasir assured the BNP that the Election Commission does not take sides and that the matter would be dealt with neutrally.



The US strike package included B-2 bombers escorted by F-22 and F-16 fighter jets, and supported by EA-18 Growler electronic warfare aircraft. US Navy destroyers in the eastern Mediterranean also intercepted incoming missiles during the operation, Fox News reported.

Fordow had two entrances and one ventilation shaft, which likely served as the entrance points for the Massive Ordnance Penetrators (MOPs), sources said.

Additionally, 30 Tomahawk

Scope for whitening black money goes

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The real estate stakeholders are saying flat sales may drop as a result, he said.

"Around 50 to 60 types of professionals are involved in this sector, from masons to painters. Still, I am not saying those with money won't buy flats. Maybe they will just pay a higher tax. So we have completely rolled back that earlier provision."

When asked whether the provision was scrapped due to criticism, he said: "Definitely, we considered that. Besides, there was strong public demand."

On June 2, the government unveiled the finance bill retaining the scope to legalise untaxed assets through investment in real estate but at a much higher cost.

Earlier, Transparency International Bangladesh warned it would fuel corruption, while the Centre for Policy Dialogue described it as a betrayal of

the spirit of the July Uprising.

Welcoming the decision, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, said this can be a good precedent for the future.

"However, we call upon the relevant authorities to be on guard against any possible manipulation that may facilitate the same evil practice in disguise in the name of investing undisclosed income."

There can be no clear dividing line between undisclosed income and black money, he said.

"While one may fail to fully disclose a fraction of income, no sensible, honest income earner can keep or bring from abroad large amounts in crores for any investment, including real estate, unless the source is illegal."

If such scope is kept, it will imply deception with the public and be self-defeating for the government, he

added.

"This is a positive move," said CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun.

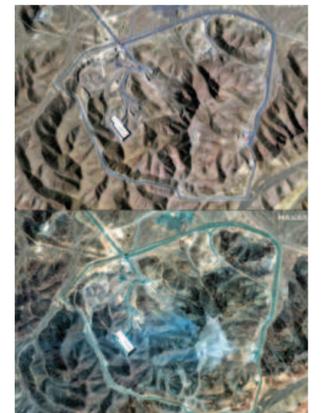
Allowing black money whitening provision is unethical and discriminatory against honest taxpayers.

Such a provision encourages the accumulation of unearned money through various means, she added.

Meanwhile, the government has granted value-added tax (VAT) exemption at the production stage of cotton produced through the recycling of garment waste (jhut).

The government also VAT exempted the import of ballpoint pens and the rent of space and premises for beauty parlours operated by women entrepreneurs.

Besides, advance tax exemption has been granted on the import of heart stents and eye lenses.



Meanwhile, Dhaka yesterday expressed deep concern over the recent attacks targeting nuclear facilities in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any actions that could escalate tensions in the region.

It also said that the first group of Bangladeshi nationals willing to return from conflict-hit Iran is expected to arrive home next week.

Israel and Iran have traded wave after wave of devastating strikes since Israel launched its aerial campaign on June 13, saying Tehran was on the verge of developing a nuclear weapon. Iran denies seeking an atomic bomb.

The US strikes came as European powers stepped up diplomacy to defuse the crisis. Top diplomats from Britain, France and Germany had met Araghchi in Geneva on Friday and urged him to resume nuclear talks with the United States that had been derailed by the war.

While it remains unclear if and how Iran will respond to the US attacks, the conflict could quickly spiral to engulf the entire region.

Iran and its allies in Yemen, Lebanon could attack US bases and interests across the Gulf, while Iraqi groups allied with Tehran may also get involved in the fighting, destabilising the country that is seeing some relative calm after decades of bloodshed since the 2003 American invasion.

At the customs' end, the government has reduced the import duty on crude petroleum from 5 percent to 3 percent and on other petroleum products from 10 percent to 6 percent.

To make equipment related to solar power generation more accessible, the import duty on solar inverters has been reduced from 10 percent to 1 percent, according to the finance ministry statement.

To encourage the production of quality tyres in the country, the import duty on one of the key raw materials "Technically Specified Natural Rubber" has been halved to 5 percent, it said.

In a separate measure, the government has reduced the withholding tax on property transfers.

The existing rates of 8 percent, 6 percent and 4 percent have been brought down to 5 percent, 3 percent and 2 percent respectively.

No breakthrough yet on PM's tenure

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institutions like the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission. Most parties support this proposal, but the BNP and allies say that such a body would undermine the elected government's authority.

Disagreement among parties also remains over the upper house, with most parties, except the BNP, favouring proportional representation.

After Salahuddin said this at the televised meeting, there was a 15-minute break in the broadcast for private consultation among parties.

Wrapping up the day's talks, National Consensus Commission Vice Chairman Professor Ali Riaz said that after lengthy deliberations, most participants agreed that no individual should serve as prime minister for more than 10 years. However, full consensus

was not reached due to reservations from the BNP, National Democratic Movement, and Bangladesh Liberal Democratic Party.

He added that the parties requested two days for policy-level consultation before the talks resume.

Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher told reporters that his party supported the proposed 10-year cap.

Tasnim Jara, senior joint member secretary of the National Citizen Party, said, "If there is consensus on a 10-year cap... we are willing to consider it."

She added that constitutional bodies should be non-partisan.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh spokesperson Gazi Ataur Rahman said "If the constitution includes democracy, it must also include full faith in Allah."

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said, "The values of 1972 must remain unchanged. We are open to additions, but not to replacing the foundational values. There is no scope for compromise on this. Some say these principles are partisan, but only those who oppose independence oppose these values."

Gono Odhikar Parishad leader Nurul Haque Nur said, "We began the day with the agreement that no one should serve [as the PM] more than two terms. But a few parties vetoed that. Then the discussion was about the number of years, with most supporting a 10-year cap. But still, not all agreed."

"At some point, the commission must act as the referee. Otherwise, these discussions will go on until Keyamat."

Ganosambhati Andolon leader Zonayed Saki said, "Despite differences, we are getting closer to a common ground. That's a positive sign."

On constitutional principles, Salahuddin said the reform commission's initial proposal was to abolish articles 8, 9, 10, and 12 and suggest alternatives.

After BNP's suggestions, the inclusion of equality, human dignity, social justice, and democracy as principles are being discussed.

Jamaat leader Taher said his party supported having equality, justice, democracy, and human dignity as principles.

He added that Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim and faith in Almighty Allah must remain in the preamble.