

CEC meets chief adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin called on Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus yesterday after the government announced a tentative election timeline earlier this month.

This was the first meeting between the two after the announcement.

The meeting took place at the State Guest House Jamuna, said Abul Kalam Azad Majumder, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser.

On June 13, Yunus said the next parliamentary election could be held a week ahead of Ramadan in 2026, provided all preparations are completed.

The announcement followed a meeting in London with BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, where the latter suggested holding the election before Ramadan.

Yunus previously said the elections could be held in the first half of April next year.

After the meeting with Tarique, he said the February timeline will depend on progress in reforms and the trials of perpetrators of killings in the July uprising.

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Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin pays a courtesy call on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

Law adviser

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far as I know, apart from Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, no other newspaper in Bangladesh has a code of conduct. A code of conduct is a form of self-regulation -- you'll find it in every major newspaper in the world.

"Let me give you examples from the two dailies where there is a code of conduct. At The Daily Star, around 13 to 14 years ago ... and I can give you all the evidence if you want ... there was a lecturer at the law department of Dhaka University. I remember it clearly because of his position. He had made extremely offensive remarks about Khaleda Zia, and in response, Chhatra Dal became very angry. They began protesting and demanded his removal from the university."

He continued, "But The Daily Star turned him into a national hero -- they started featuring him on the front page, calling him a professor, even though he was just a lecturer. Every day, the paper referred to him as 'professor', simply because he had insulted Khaleda Zia."

"When the Dhaka University Teachers Association unanimously decided to expel him, that news never made it to The Daily Star."

"I'm very sorry to say this ... that man was so deranged that he died by suicide a few years ago. And this is the person The Daily Star turned into a hero."

"But when he was expelled from the Dhaka University Club, no less -- the first time someone was unanimously expelled in the history of that club -- The Daily Star didn't print a word about it."

Turning to this newspaper's correspondent present at the seminar, the law adviser said, "If you raised this with Mahfuz bhai [the editor and publisher of The Daily Star] ... I will give it to you... This can be a classic story."

"My question is: why did this newspaper publish two incorrect pieces of information?"

"First, they elevated a lecturer to 'professor' and turned him into a front page icon. Second, when he was expelled, they completely ignored the news."

He recommended, "This is a request to journalists in general. Collectivise and suggest alternative proposals. That will surely be better than any initiative that the government comes up with."

Nazrul also said, "If journalists have inbuilt partisanship, then it will be difficult for the general public to trust them."

Following the seminar, our correspondent requested the law adviser to provide us with the details of the case he had mentioned at the seminar.

He told our correspondent over the phone that he could not recall the details of the incident. "The incident may have happened 20 years ago, and the first name of the lecturer in question may have been Shafique."

He said he did not have any further details at the moment.

The law adviser went on to reassess his action of referring to the case at the seminar. He told our correspondent, "Perhaps, this case should not have been referred to publicly. The man had committed suicide later on..."

He requested the correspondent to put the matter to rest. The Daily Star, however, believes it has a responsibility to look into it.

Later on, The Daily Star sent another message requesting him to furnish the newspaper with specifics but was yet to receive a response.

Turmoil deepens at NBR

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100 VAT, customs and tax offices across the country have been observing a daily five-hour work abstention since Wednesday.

The protest runs from 12pm to 5pm each day.

While export consignments are still being processed, importers say they are unable to clear their goods due to the ongoing disruption, which, in turn, is affecting exports that depend on imported raw materials.

One such aggrieved importer is Anamul Islam, owner of Golden Steel Traders.

His imported consignment of 12 containers arrived at Chattogram Port last Sunday but he is unable to complete customs clearance or pay the duty to release the goods. Due to the delay, he has to count container and port charges amounting to about Tk 1.5 lakh a day.

However, Deputy Commissioner of Chattogram Custom House Mohammad Saidul Islam said directives have been issued to ensure no file remains pending after the abstention hours.

Export operations and airport services remain functional during the protests, he said, adding that his office has not received any official complaints regarding the issue.

The average number of import consignment assessments and

inspections per day has dropped from about 4,000 to approximately 2,000 over the past few days, according to data from Chattogram Customs House.

Achieving the annual revenue target for the fiscal year is unlikely amid the protests, according to customs officials.

As of June 25, Tk 73,321 crore has been collected against the annual target of Tk 83,432 crore.

"Naturally, our revenue collection is being hampered to some extent due to the ongoing movement," said NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan at an event organised by the Economic Reporters' Forum in Dhaka yesterday.

Meanwhile, experts believe the issue is being prolonged due to ego clashes.

"It is not about anyone stepping down or serving anyone's ego -- the economy is suffering due to this stalemate," said Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The council also announced a 'March to NBR' programme for June 28 during which all offices under the tax, customs and VAT departments across the country will march towards the NBR headquarters.

"A virtual meeting is underway with the top NBR officials. We are open to discussions if a formal proposal comes from the government, even if that happens on a Friday," one of the protesters told The Daily Star at 11:00pm yesterday.

The following process should involve key stakeholders, including business leaders, experts and political party

leaders.

The process must remain open and transparent, focusing on creating a professional, efficient, and accountable tax system, he added.

The protesting officials though boycotted the Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed's offer of a meeting yesterday to break the impasse saying it was not an "official invitation".

However, some senior NBR officials met with Ahmed.

"We had an open discussion, and I believe this issue will be resolved soon -- we plan to hold another meeting next week to finalise things," Ahmed said after the meeting.

At a press briefing following the four-day pen-down strike, the council sought Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' intervention to solve the crisis.

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culture of governance.

"We expected a different Bangladesh after the regime change, but the 'deep state' remains intact. These institutions still operate as before, and we see no signs of policy change," he said.

Prothom Alo Joint Editor Sohrab Hossain questioned the government's narrative of powerlessness.

"If the law adviser says his ministry has no role, then what is the home adviser's responsibility? The home ministry repeatedly promised to act against false cases, but what action has been taken?"

He described the current situation as an "unhealthy and abnormal time" where a culture of fear persists.

Among the topics discussed was the structural crisis plaguing the media, including ownership and financial opacity.

AB Party Chairman Mujibur Rahman Monju highlighted how business interests

are crippling journalism. "We don't want to see any possibility of reforms without a revolution," he added.

Bobby Hajaj, chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement, suggested that news media outlets be legally structured as non-profit organisations, with a clear separation between ownership and editorial boards to ensure independence.

CGS Executive Director Zillur Rahman who moderated the event, concluded that while legal reforms are crucial, the rampant filing of murder cases against journalists has become the most pressing threat, acting as a "hanging sword" over the profession.

BNP activist Dr Shakhawat Hossain Sayantan, Rubin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh; political analyst Zahed Ur Rahman, senior journalist MA Aziz, and Qadrudin Shishir, founding editor of The Dissent, also spoke at the event, among others.

Govt launches probe

FROM PAGE 1

"...In order to ensure the people's right to vote in future, safeguard democracy in the country and to prevent the threat of fascism and authoritarian rule, the interim government has decided to investigate the corruption, irregularities and criminal activities committed in these elections," it added.

The five-member committee is led by Justice Shamim Hasnain, a retired High Court judge and current member of the Law Commission. Other members are: Shamim Al Mamun, former additional secretary; Kazi Mahfuzul Haque (Supan), associate professor of law at Dhaka University; lawyer Tajriya Akram Hussain; and election expert Abdul Alim.

Justice Hasnain served at the High Court from 2005 to 2017.

Kazi Mahfuzul Haque was a member of the Judicial Reform Commission, while Alim previously served on the Electoral Reform Commission. Tajriya is an advocate at the District and Sessions Judges Court, Dhaka.

The areas of the committee's work will include analysing reports by election observers, domestic and foreign monitoring organisations and civil society groups, and complaints raised in the media regarding the polls.

It will assess expert opinions on the allegations of corruption, irregularities, and criminal activities in these elections and their overall impartiality and acceptability.

The committee will analyse the role of the Awami League and those involved in limiting the participation of political parties in these elections and obstructing the people's right to vote.

It will also scrutinise the roles of the former election commissions, their secretariat, administration, law enforcement and intelligence agencies in the election process.

Allegations of financial misconduct by former election commissions will also come under review.

Based on its findings, the committee will determine the responsibility for irregularities.

It will also make recommendations on changes to relevant laws, rules and regulations, the Election Commission and administrative arrangements.

The gazette came just hours after a one-on-one meeting between Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus

Holy Ashura on July 6

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussein (RA), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at the Battle of Karbala, will be observed in the country on July 6, as the moon marking the beginning of Muharram was sighted yesterday.

So, the month of Muharram of 1447 Hijri begins today. Therefore, the holy Ashura will be observed on July 6, according to an Islamic Foundation press release issued yesterday.

The decision was made at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee at Islamic Foundation conference room in the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the evening. Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain chaired the meeting.

Ukraine stopped Russian advances

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine's army chief yesterday ordered defensive lines to be built more quickly in the northeastern Sumy region, as Russian forces gained ground towards the industrial Dnipropetrovsk region.

Sumy lies over the border from Russia's Kursk region where Ukrainian forces launched an audacious land grab last year that Moscow took months to push back, with the help of North Korean forces.

Law ministry's 'hands are tied'

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Meanwhile, Shafiqul Islam, press secretary to the chief adviser, attributed the current hostile environment towards journalists to a "severe trust deficit" created during the Awami League's 15-year rule.

He said the interim government is not using any administrative or legal tools to silence journalists.

The average number of import consignment assessments and

Earlier at the discussion, Badiul Alam Majumdar, head of the Election Reform Commission, highlighted the "anarchy" in the media landscape over the past decade.

Citing the Media Reform Commission's report, he said many television licences were granted to individuals aligned with the AL's political philosophy. "This played a significant role in undermining the country's democratic system and electoral integrity."

Journalists and civil society members at the roundtable were critical of the widespread use of murder and attempted murder charges to intimidate the press.

The Daily Star's senior reporter Zyma Islam presented her findings, which showed 266 journalists reportedly facing murder or attempted murder charges following the July uprising. The actual number, however, could be higher.

Of the 266, only around 53 (20 percent) had overt political affiliations.

"The rest are ordinary journalists like you and me," she said, arguing that this reflects a widespread strategy of harassment rather than targeted political action.

Journalist Muktadir Rashid questioned the justification for detaining media workers without trial.

"Why are journalists being detained without trial, with one case after another being filed against them? ... If being associated with a political party is a crime for a journalist today, the same can happen under a different government in the future."

Renowned photographer and activist Shahidul Alam noted that a case filed against him under the now defunct ICT Act in 2018 is still ongoing. "This is nothing but harassment."

He also pointed to colonial era laws like the Official Secrets Act, 1923, as persistent barriers to free speech, stressing that while laws can be changed, real progress requires a shift in the

structure of governance.

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face of America," he said, a reference to Iran's missile launch targeting the largest US base in the Middle East.

"I want to congratulate the great Iranian nation... for its victory over the fallacious Zionist regime," he added, claiming that Israel had "almost collapsed" because of Iran's strikes.

Both Iran and Israel had already claimed they won, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailing on Tuesday a "historic victory