

Ensure blanket security during Feb election

Yunus directs chiefs of armed forces

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has directed the chiefs of the three services to take all-out measures to ensure foolproof security and maintain peace during the upcoming 13th national election, scheduled for the first half of February.

According to the Chief Adviser's Press Wing, Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan met the chief adviser at the state guest house Jamuna around 7:00pm yesterday.

National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman was also present during the meeting.

At the meeting, Yunus lauded the members of the armed forces for their dedication and hard work in maintaining law and order and ensuring national security.

He said members of the army and other forces have worked tirelessly over the past 15 months to uphold law and order across the country.

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday sat with the chiefs of the three armed services and gave them directives to ensure foolproof security during the upcoming 13th national election scheduled for February next year. National Security Adviser Dr Khalilur Rahman was also present at the meeting held at the State Guest House Jamuna.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

Trump says ready to maintain US food aid funding despite shutdown

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump appeared to issue a lifeline Friday for low-income Americans reliant on food aid, saying he does not want them to "go hungry" a day before some 42 million people could lose their monthly assistance.

In a lengthy Truth Social post, Trump said "Government lawyers do not think we have the legal authority to pay" the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits once funding expires on November 1 during the ongoing government shutdown, but added that he has instructed them to "clarify how we can legally fund SNAP as soon as possible."

A federal judge in Rhode Island gave the program a temporary reprieve earlier Friday, ordering the White House to use emergency funds to pay for food stamps during the shutdown, in a case brought by charities and other groups.

But the administration has been arguing it cannot legally tap that fund, and it was not immediately clear, despite the ruling, whether Americans would get their weekend SNAP payments.

Since partisan gridlock sent the US government into shutdown October 1, many federal workers have gone without paychecks and millions of Americans are increasingly caught in the crossfire of a lack of basic federal services.

BNP yet to firm up candidates, Jamaat done

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The BNP wants the proportional representation system in a proposed upper house on the basis of shares of seats in the lower house.

The Jamaat, on the other hand, has launched protests demanding that shares of total vote obtained by each party, not seats, form the basis of the upper house.

FRUSTRATION GROWING IN BNP

The delay in selecting candidates has visibly slowed the BNP's campaign and stirred resentment among nomination seekers, many of whom note that Jamaat candidates have been canvassing for months.

BNP's indecision over seat-sharing with allies and its stance on the July charter are key reasons for the delay, political analysts say.

Prof Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, a former government and politics teacher at Jahangirnagar University, said the BNP might not be announcing its candidates formally for strategic reasons.

"It is still in discussion over seat sharing with its allies. Besides, it has also been stuck with the July charter issues," he pointed out.

Interviews with more than three dozen grassroots BNP leaders suggest fears of internal rifts and rebel candidacies if the process drags further.

"The longer the party delays the announcement, the more misunderstandings will grow, and complications will be created. At some point, this may lead to disorder among party members," said SA Jinnah Kabir, a former general secretary of Manikganj district BNP.

A nomination seeker from Satkhira-2, requesting anonymity, noted Jamaat's six-month head start while in some constituencies, there are multiple BNP candidates still now. "The delay is widening the distance among these candidates," he said.

On October 24, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said the party would finalise its candidates for around 200 constituencies within October. The time has passed but there has been no announcement yet.

Senior BNP leaders privately admit seat-sharing is proving difficult,

especially where allies lack strong bases. Another Standing Committee member said the party is prioritising seats where allies "have realistic chances", complicating decisions.

Internal rivalries and multiple strong contenders in nearly 100 constituencies have further slowed the process.

The party has already conducted a three-phase shortlisting, including surveys by acting chairman Tarique Rahman's team, nationwide meetings with aspirants, and collection of personal documents.

Standing Committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said, "I hope that by the middle of November, the BNP will officially announce the names. Since ours is a large political party, it is selecting its candidates by considering many equations and challenges. So, there is no reason for the leaders and activists to be disappointed."

Despite delays, sources say the BNP believes it can catch up. Some party leaders claimed Jamaat candidates are "spreading propaganda" against the BNP, prompting the party to consider counter-strategies.

Several potential nominees said Tarique has personally phoned them, encouraging quiet preparation until the names are announced.

"The process is being kept confidential, and top leaders have reportedly directed that this information must not be shared with rival nomination seekers until the official election schedule is announced," said a BNP leader who claimed to have received the call.

A BNP Standing Committee member, seeking anonymity, said the party has almost finalised the list of candidates for around 200 constituencies. A large portion of them contested the 2018 election.

"The list is now being thoroughly reviewed in line with the party's requirements. The final list will be formally published after getting the Standing Committee's approval."

Leaders said that beyond the 200 constituencies already under consideration, the BNP is struggling to finalise candidates in 60 to 70 seats due to internal conflicts and the presence of multiple strong

contenders.

Seven alliance partners have separately sought 106 seats from the BNP to contest the upcoming election.

The BNP is also considering forming a "broader alliance" with the aim of establishing a national government that would include more than 50 parties, which took part in anti-government protests with the BNP simultaneously during the Awami League's regime.

JAMAAT'S EARLY MARCH

Contacted for comments, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar told The Daily Star the party has "primarily selected candidates for all 300 constituencies" and will confirm the final slate after the schedule is unveiled.

Around 80 percent of Jamaat's picks are new faces who have never contested an election before, while about 60 have experience in running for public offices.

Many were chosen through votes of upazila- and district-level leaders and the central nomination board.

"Given the changed political context and people's expectations, the party has decided to bring forward young leadership," Porwar said.

"There are many young voters ... Our new candidates are working for Bangladesh, and the young generation will surely want such candidates," he said.

The Jamaat has also set up polling centre-level committees and recruited polling agents nationwide.

At least 16 candidates are former presidents of Islami Chhatra Shibir, including Dhaka South Secretary Shafiqul Islam Masud.

Porwar said Islamist parties are discussing an "understanding" for seat adjustments, adding, "Once the electoral understanding or alliance is finalised, candidates will be withdrawn from some constituencies."

Jamaat last saw major electoral success in the fifth (1991) and eighth (2001) parliamentary polls, winning 18 and 17 seats respectively. Ahead of the 2026 election, it is again seeking to lead an Islamist alliance with Islami Andolan Bangladesh and others.

Wishing anonymity, a central NCP leader told The Daily Star that his party's stance is that the chief adviser must issue the July charter implementation order and there must be no notes of dissent. "If these conditions are met, the party will not oppose holding the referendum alongside the election."

Samanta Sharmeen, NCP's senior joint convener, said they were not against the referendum. However, the way the consensus commission created confusion over it has made the situation between two political parties more complicated.

Speaking at an event in the Paltan area yesterday, NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Tusher said, "How can a political party that was born through a referendum now campaign against it?" He also described BNP's position as "self-destructive".

Potato farmers drown in debt as price plummets

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Experts blame the government for the potato farmers' current predicament: the DAE failed to warn farmers about overcultivation, while the minimum cold storage gate price of Tk 22 per kg and a planned procurement of 50,000 tonnes were not implemented.

"The market collapse has left both farmers and traders in distress," said Prashanta Kumar Mondal, manager of Kadam Rasul Cold Storage in Munshiganj.

The cold storage has around 20,000 sacks of potatoes belonging to over a hundred farmers and traders.

"Barely 200 sacks are sold each day. After paying the cold storage rent of Tk 280 per sack, farmers are left with only Tk 50 to 100 in hand. There's no way to recover their losses," he said.

District DAE Deputy Director Md Habibur Rahman acknowledged the government's earlier plan to ensure sales at Tk 22 per kilogram did not materialise for various reasons.

"Prices continue to fall by the day. With new potatoes expected to arrive in the market by November, there will likely be little demand for the old stock," said Agricultural Marketing Officer ABM Mizanul Haque.

The entire issue reflects weak

Domestic demand is only around 90 lakh tonnes

Government's Tk 22 floor price was never enforced

No potato procurement has started yet

Experts blame poor management and delayed action

government management and a lack of priority for farmers, said prominent economist Jahangir Alam Khan.

Despite repeated warnings, the government did not take the farmers' distress seriously. As a result, many farmers have been severely harmed, driven into debt, and are now in deep financial trouble, he said.

"This is totally a management

failure. When prices fell, there should have been a floor price, but they did not set one for a long time."

Only after four or five months, when public outcry began, they fixed it at Tk 22, which merely covers the cost of production and not the absolute minimum.

"Even that was not properly implemented," he said, adding that the government should have procured a large quantity of potatoes.

With total production more than 1 crore tonne, the government should have purchased 12-13 lakh tonnes.

But they only bought 50,000 tonnes, he said.

Potato cultivation in the coming season will decline because farmers will cut back due to the losses they faced this year. Consequently, production will fall, prices will rise, and consumers will suffer.

This situation highlights the absence of a balanced agricultural policy, he added.

Meanwhile, in a letter to the agriculture ministry on October 13, the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association warned that without immediate intervention, many farmers might be forced to sell off the seed potatoes in storage, jeopardising next year's production.

Free police from political grip

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approval is mandatory within 24 hours. Failure to comply will be treated as unlawful detention."

Nazrul said the proposed independent police commission would investigate complaints and recommend policy changes. "Execution will remain with the ministry to ensure stability. If we give absolute authority to the commission, a future government may repeal it altogether."

Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matuir Rahman said the July uprising exposed the fragile relationship between the police and the people. "Reform efforts have been discussed repeatedly, but change has remained elusive. This time, the opportunity for genuine transformation should not be lost."

Former IGP Nurul Huda said political interference had deeply damaged the institution. "When recruitment, posting, and promotion depend on political patronage, professionalism collapses. The police must be insulated from both political and administrative influence."

Former additional IGP Yeasmin Gafur, in her keynote, said the events of July 2024 were a reminder that neither an authoritarian nor an absent police force could sustain democracy. "The challenge now is to rebuild the institution through transparency and professionalism."

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, also a member of the National Consensus Commission, said, "If the ministry continues to control posting, transfer, and promotion, police independence will remain on paper."

He said politicisation of state

institutions is not new and has intensified over time. "The unhealthy competition to cling to power has pushed every institution into partisanship. Police reform requires political reform too."

Human rights activist Nur Khan Liton, also a member of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, said accountability must extend to the justice system. "We've seen detainees tortured in police lines, which have turned into secret detention centres. Magistrates often issue remand orders despite visible injuries. Judicial silence allows impunity to persist."

M Akbar Ali, president of Retired Police Officers' Welfare Association, said the colonial-era police act turned the force into an instrument of power. "For over six decades, the ministry has controlled the police but never taken responsibility for its failures. Political and administrative control must end. We want to see the police transform from a force to a service, accountable and humane."

National Citizen Party Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adeeb said non-political internal syndicates also obstruct reform. "Power circles within the force, often linked to former officials or influential families, manipulate promotions and postings. These must be dismantled."

He added that the Anti-Corruption Commission should be involved in selecting the independent police commission for transparency.

BNP acting chairman's Adviser Mahdi Amin said the proposed commission must ensure policing is free from political influence. "Over the last 16 years, police were used for disappearances, torture, and false cases. BNP was the biggest

victim, but we want this culture to end for good.... Police must protect citizens, not regimes." He stressed that investigations should rely on evidence, not confessions.

Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Kader urged the immediate formation of the proposed police commission with a clear legal framework. "There is no time to lose. Reform must be completed before a political government returns."

He called for structural measures defining the ministry-police command, ending the "renting" of police and lawyers, and overhauling training to build a dignified, service-oriented institution.

During the open discussion, Adviser Nazrul said the draft law would empower the commission to probe complaints, including those by junior officers against superiors, and recommend actions to the ministry based on severity.

Iftekharuzzaman argued that the commission's directives should be binding, warning that leaving enforcement entirely to the ministry would weaken accountability. "If enforcement depends on the same ministry accused of interference, independence [of the force] will remain rhetorical."

In response, Nazrul said binding clauses could apply to police matters, with other institutions requiring separate mechanisms.

IGP Baharul Alam concluded the discussion expressing optimism that, under Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's guidance, a welfare-oriented and accountable police commission would soon take shape.

Tipu Sultan, head of politics and crime at Prothom Alo, moderated the roundtable.