



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus poses for a photo with the participants at the certificate distribution ceremony for the Defence Services Command and Staff College Course-2025 at the DSCSC Complex in Mirpur Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## BNP wants ROs from commission 9% children

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the EC to establish a fact-checking cell to curb online misinformation. He proposed a central unit of the cell at the EC and decentralised units at the upazila level, along with clear timeframes for reviewing complaints related to misinformation and disinformation.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar and Assistant Secretary General AHM Hamidur Rahman Azad questioned the recent series of administrative reshuffles.

To build trust, Jamaat proposed lottery-based transfers of DCs and SPs.

Porwar said, "It hasn't even been a month, not even 20 days, and suddenly a deputy commissioner was transferred. Within a week, many others were reshuffled. It appears this is being done with a particular design or purpose."

He also asked the EC to clarify how expatriates would vote in the referendum. The Jamaat leader proposed allowing expats to register using either passports or NIDs.

Terming the three-loudspeaker limit impractical for large constituencies, he sought revisions to the rule.

On polling day security, he demanded at least five army personnel at every centre.

Porwar further said the code of conduct requires parties and candidates to sign undertakings, but does not specify where parties should submit theirs, while nominations are filed locally.

Jamaat leader Shishir Monir noted that although the code of conduct prescribes penalties of up to six months' imprisonment or Tk 1 lakh, or both, it does not clarify which authority will enforce these sanctions. He also called for a specific timeframe for resolving pre-election irregularities.

NCP Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwari urged the EC to immediately begin the referendum process, as it is planned to be held along with the election.

He insisted that alliance candidates must use their own party symbols.

"Borrowing another party's symbol will not be allowed. Even if candidates are part of an alliance, they must contest under their own symbol."

He said the NCP would fully cooperate with the EC if it maintained institutional independence and upheld its accountability to the constitution rather than to any party.

NCP Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara demanded an extension of the December 23 deadline for expatriates to register for postal balloting.

She proposed visible 24/7 helplines or email support for the expats during the registration and voting process, with specified response times for queries or complaints. She suggested allowing expats to register using either passports or NIDs.

She also called for a dedicated social media monitoring cell and a multi-channel reporting system, alongside collaboration with platforms such as Meta and TikTok, to ensure

rapid takedown of harmful content.

NCP Joint Member Secretary Jahirul Islam argued that the BNP should not be allowed to use the portrait of Tarique Rahman in campaign materials, since Khaleda Zia remains the party chairperson.

Several parties, including Ganosamhati Andolan led by Zonayed Saki, said alliance partners should be allowed to contest using the symbols of other parties within the alliance.

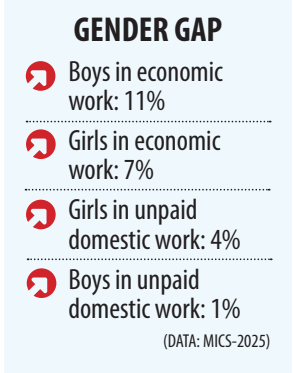
Saki and Gono Odhikar Parishad General Secretary Rashed Khan also criticised the EC for amending the RPO and the code of conduct before consulting stakeholders.

Participants also asked how the EC planned to organise the referendum and raise awareness about its voting procedure.

The CEC said clarity would come once an ordinance on the referendum is issued, as it would outline the process in full.

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percent) and Sylhet (8.9 percent) report lower rates, reflecting better access to education and economic opportunities.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, cited the country's economic situation as a



major reason. "There is a mismatch between adults' incomes and the cost of living. Low-income families are unable to meet their daily expenses. Without addressing this, awareness drives or punitive measures alone will not solve the problem."

He added that the education system is also failing to play an adequate role in preventing child labour. "Students often lack sufficient opportunities and facilities for learning. Many cannot attend school regularly or are not motivated to pursue education. Many eventually enter work without any skills."

"Many projects have been running for years, but their effectiveness has not been properly evaluated.

### Khalil, Doval meet in Delhi

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in Delhi since she fled Dhaka on August 5.

"The Bangladesh delegation to the seventh NSA-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave [CSC], led by National Security Adviser Dr Khalilur Rahman, met with India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his team today [yesterday] in Delhi," the Bangladesh High Commission said in a statement.

It added that "they discussed the work of CSC and key bilateral issues" but did not provide further details.

Khalilur also invited Doval to visit Bangladesh at his convenience.

Khalilur arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday evening, a day ahead of schedule. He had been due to travel yesterday for the CSC meeting called by Doval in the Indian capital today (November 20).

Hours after the ICT ruling against Hasina, the Bangladesh foreign ministry issued a statement making a renewed push for her extradition from India.

Following the verdict, India's External Affairs Ministry said New Delhi had noted the ruling of the International Crimes Tribunal concerning the former prime minister.

"As a close neighbour, India remains committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace,

Compared to city-based or ad-hoc programmes, village-based, community-centric initiatives are likely to be more effective. If government and private organisations collaborate with families to implement local initiatives, they may yield better results."

Sultan also stressed that the lack of social security for adult workers is a key factor driving child labour. "When an accident or illness occurs, children in the family have to work. If parents' incomes are insufficient, children are forced into labour."

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, highlighted the disproportionate impact of child labour on girls.

"While boys are sent to earn an income, girls are kept busy with domestic work, missing out on schooling. In many cases, they are married off young, which not only ends their education but also exposes them to unsafe pregnancies. What girls learn is often forgotten, their development stalled."

She added that to reduce child labour and the burden of unpaid care work on girls, the government needs to adopt comprehensive strategies.

"A high-level committee is already working on this, but if the root causes – poverty and lack of parental awareness – are not addressed, the pressure on children cannot be reduced. Parents' livelihoods must be stabilised, and they must understand that responsibilities should not be forced onto children."

## EC unlikely to sit with JP, 6 other AL allies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Breaking with its own plan and past practice, the Election Commission abruptly ended its ongoing dialogue without meeting at least seven registered political parties, many of them long-time allies of the Awami League over the past 15 years.

This came despite the EC's electoral working plan, announced in August, which had pledged discussions with all registered parties ahead of the polls.

The parties left out of the talks are the Jatiya Party, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), Bangladesher Shamyobadi Dal, Ganatantri Party, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, and Jatiya Party-JP.

Forty-seven parties participated in the dialogue that began on November 13. Officials confirmed last night that the talks had ended, noting that one invited party did not attend.

"The first phase of our talks with political parties concluded today [yesterday]," Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarker told this newspaper.

Asked whether the excluded parties would be invited later, he said, "We will take decisions regarding those parties at a later stage," offering no further clarity.

Another election commissioner said the talks with the remaining parties may not take place at all, as objections were being raised from several quarters.

On May 12, the government banned all activities of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations, alleging killings, genocide, crimes against humanity and other grave offences during the July uprising.

Hours later, the EC suspended the party's registration.

## Jamaat, 7 parties ramp up pressure for pre-polls referendum

Announce rallies in divisional cities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight like-minded parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, yesterday vowed to continue their movement to realise the alliance's five-point demand, including holding a referendum before the national polls.

Maulana Yusuf Ashraf, senior naye-e-amir of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, announced rallies in all divisional cities except Dhaka between November 30 and December 6, with top leaders addressing each gathering.

Rallies will be held in Rangpur on November 30, Rajshahi on December 1, Khulna on December 2, Barishal on December 3, Mymensingh on December 4, Sylhet on December 5, and Chattogram on December 6.

"We will continue campaigning and building public opinion in favour of a 'yes' vote in the referendum," Yusuf Ashraf said at a press briefing after holding meeting with alliance representatives in the capital.

The alliance's five-point demand includes the death sentence for Sheikh Hasina in a crimes against humanity case, implementation of the July charter, trials of those responsible for the July killings, a ban on parties like Jatiya Party seen as accomplices of the former autocracy, and ensuring a level playing field for the election. While some demands – the death sentence for Hasina and the directive to implement the July charter – have been met, others remain unfulfilled.

Hamidur Rahman Azad, Jamaat assistant secretary general, also spoke.

## Nations 'still far' from deal at UN climate talks

Says French minister as discord persists on finance, emissions cuts

AGENCIES

France's environment minister said yesterday that governments remain far from reaching a deal at UN climate talks in Brazil, but she was nonetheless "more optimistic" than the day before.

COP30 host Brazil released a draft deal Tuesday, hoping to get nations to agree on the most contentious points as soon as yesterday, two days before the conference is scheduled to end in Belem.



"No, there will not be a COP decision today (Wednesday). I don't see how that could happen," French ecological transition minister Monique Barbut told AFP.

"However, yes, there is a little bit of movement. But we are still far from the mark because for us, it must be a comprehensive package," Barbut said after a coordination meeting with European colleagues. She added, however, that she was "more optimistic" than she was the day before.

A new text was due to be published yesterday. Brazil said on Tuesday it still expects to land a deal on some of the most contentious issues, but conceded there were still wide gaps between countries on issues like fossil fuels, reports Reuters.

## Child marriage still a bleak shadow

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In a press release issued yesterday, the UNFPA welcomed the MICS findings but urged faster action to address gaps in women's and girls' protection, noting that the survey's 172 indicators – including 27 tied to the Sustainable Development Goals – reveal a mixed picture.

The study shows how Bangladesh has reduced infant deaths and improved maternal care, with more women delivering in facilities and receiving skilled assistance. But despite these gains, the UNFPA expressed concern that child marriage remains a deepening crisis.

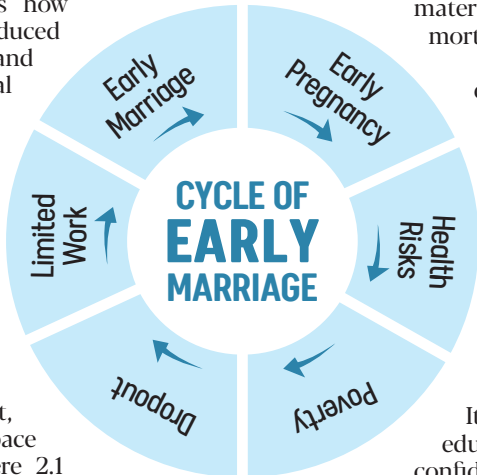
According to it, at the current pace of reduction, a mere 2.1 percent annually, it would take over 200 years to eradicate child marriage – far beyond national development ambitions.

The adolescent birth rate (ABR) has also risen from 83 to 92, underscoring the link between early marriage, early pregnancy, and adverse health and social outcomes. The ABR is a statistical measure that indicates how many births occur per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 in a given year.

That the MICS study notes that gaps in contraception and family planning are pushing more girls into early pregnancy, locking them deeper into the cycle of child marriage.

UNFPA stressed that without addressing these barriers and the harmful social norms that sustain them, efforts to stamp out early marriage will fall short.

"As Bangladesh accelerates towards upper-middle-income status by 2031 and strives to achieve the SDGs, there is no pathway to success without investing in the health, rights, and education of women and girls," said UNFPA Representative Catherine Breen Kamkong. Experts say ending



early marriage "needs stronger enforcement, wider awareness, and real investment in girls' education, as laws alone cannot protect them without community support."

Contacted by The Daily Star recently, UNICEF Representative to Bangladesh Rana Flowers said stronger enforcement is essential. "Child marriage is not merely a harmful practice – it is violence against children and women. It strips girls of education and dignity and hinders national growth. We need a united national voice to change mindsets and enforce laws effectively rather than reducing age limits."

Dr Monzur-A-Moula, junior consultant at the Maternal and Child Health

Hospital, said, "Early marriage is a serious public health concern. Medically, adolescent girls are not biologically ready for pregnancy. Early conception increases risks of anaemia, pre-eclampsia, premature delivery, and low-birth-weight babies. Underdeveloped pelvic bones often cause obstructed labour, raising maternal and infant mortality."

"Beyond the physical dangers, early marriage harms mental health. Young brides face anxiety, depression, and stress due to sudden responsibilities, marital pressure, and loss of independence. It cuts short their education, erodes self-confidence, and increases vulnerability to domestic violence and social isolation."

He added, "From a public health perspective, early marriage perpetuates poverty, increases maternal and child mortality, and slows national development. Education, awareness, and effective law enforcement are crucial to protect girls' rights."

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said, "Scientifically, girls are not physically fit for pregnancy before 18. Even after marriage, many girls cannot express their own opinions within their families."

"In rural areas, awareness about girls' education remains low, and nothing can legitimise child marriage. After early marriage, many

women lose the chance to contribute meaningfully to society. We must create opportunities for their education, wellbeing, and empowerment so they can live with dignity."

Mumtaz Ahmed, senior secretary of the women and children affairs ministry, said, "We have halted 12,000 cases with contributions from the youth and sports ministry. We urgently need cooperation from other ministries. This issue requires a unified, multi-sectoral approach to change societal attitudes."

"The religious affairs ministry needs to play a critical role. Legally, child marriage under 16 is prohibited, regardless of consent, and the legal procedure is strict. While some justify early marriage based on religious interpretations, we are bound by national laws, which we are committed to upholding."

### CA seeks the armed forces' support for festive polls

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Yunus, speaking at a certificate distribution ceremony at the Defence Services Command and Staff College in Mirpur Cantonment, highlighted the challenge of holding a participatory election in the aftermath of an uprising.

"It's a major undertaking. After an uprising, transitioning to a peaceful, celebratory election is difficult. We need an atmosphere of unity and optimism so people can freely express their desires and aspirations," he added.