

Tulee sued over ‘hurting religious sentiments’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sanjida Islam Tulee, BNP’s primary nominee for the Dhaka-14 constituency, has been sued on charges of “hurting religious sentiments”.

Anwar Hossain, 30, a fabric trader and a former leader of Gono Odhikar Parishad, filed the case yesterday against Tulee with the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Mahbubur Rahman, the complainant’s lawyer Mahmudul Hasan told The Daily Star.

The court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to probe the case and submit a report before it.

According to the case statement, the accused has recently made “insulting comments regarding the Islamic provision of marriage”.

Tulee is the coordinator of Maayer Daak, a platform for families of enforced disappearance victims, and the sister of a disappeared BNP leader.



As winter sets in, roadside markets across the capital are brimming with warm clothes, drawing crowds of eager buyers. The photo was taken yesterday at Mohammadpur Krishi Market.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Any attempt to resist polls will face action

Says CEC Nasir Uddin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin today said the law-and-order situation had improved compared to the period after August 5 and would continue to get better.

The Election Commission would take all necessary measures if any attempt is made to resist the upcoming polls, he told reporters after inspecting election training drills of Border Guard Bangladesh at Pilkhana.

“The situation has visibly changed. People can now sleep safely and move without difficulty,” he said, adding that law enforcement agencies were preparing in a coordinated manner to ensure a peaceful election environment.

“We will need cooperation from journalists, voters and the entire nation. Together, we will prevent unwanted situations and deliver a good election,” he added.

On demands for wider army deployment, the CEC said the army moves in contingents and cannot be deployed like police or Ansar personnel. The final deployment plan would be decided on November 30 following discussions with all law enforcement agencies, he said.

He said risk assessment had already been completed, with polling centres categorised into red, yellow and green zones for deployment based on risk levels.

The CEC declined to comment on the reshuffle of superintendents of police and officers-in-charge through a lottery before the polls schedule is announced.

Akhtar Ahmed, senior secretary of the Election Commission, said such matters fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Dhaka world’s 2nd most populous city

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impacts, as well as those seeking better opportunities, said the report.

Jakarta faces similar pressures, with rising sea levels putting up to one-fourth of the city at risk of submersion by 2050, reports Al Jazeera.

The UN says the number of megacities – those with populations exceeding 10 million – has surged to 33, up from just eight in 1975.

Although Indonesia is constructing a new capital, Nusantara, the UN estimates that Jakarta’s population will continue to grow, adding another 10 million people by mid-century.

The swelling population has fuelled concern over inequality and affordability, issues that have already sparked public protests.

The report also notes that Iran’s capital, Tehran, now with a population of 9 million, is struggling with severe water shortages, prompting rationing measures.

In preparing its latest assessment, the UN adopted a new global definition of cities to reduce inconsistencies across countries.

It now classifies a city as a contiguous area of grid cells with at least 1,500 people per square kilometre and a minimum total population of 50,000.

NCP, allies may unveil a new alliance today

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Earlier in the day, Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan, chairman of AB Party, said the formation of the alliance is expected to be finalised soon.

Talking to this newspaper, UP Bangladesh Convener Ali Ahsan Zunaid said NCP, AB Party, Rashtro Songskar Andolon, and UP Bangladesh have reached an understanding. He described the talks as positive, adding, “We are also in touch with a few other parties.”

Hasnat Quaiyum, president of Rashtro Songskar Andolon, said the final announcement may come today. He added that Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Rab) and Gono Odhikar Parishad could join the alliance.

For months, the NCP has been exploring ways to forge an alliance.

On November 9, it held a meeting at its Banglamotor office to discuss polls strategy, including the possibility of forming an alliance with like-minded parties and platforms.

NCP leaders also met representatives from AB Party, Gono Odhikar Parishad, and the six-party alliance named Ganatantra Manch in October to explore alliance options.

According to party sources, the new alliance is considered a “third force” outside the dominance of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami in the next elections.

Earlier, a senior NCP leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, “We don’t intend to remain a ‘small BNP’ or a ‘small Jamaat.’ Rather than following larger parties, we believe it is time to position ourselves as a major political force. That is why we are working to forge an alliance with like-minded parties.”

A senior AB Party leader told the newspaper that this alliance would function as a political and electoral alliance. “It will remain active politically on the ground. The implementation of the July charter cannot be achieved through elections alone.”

The new alliance, once unveiled, is expected to launch a coordinated campaign for the upcoming polls slated for February next year.

Govt reshuffles SPs in all districts

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Following the reshuffle, the process to transfer officers-in-charge of police stations has begun and is also set to follow a lottery system. Decisions on transfers of range DIGs, metropolitan police commissioners, and deputy commissioners are being prepared, though officials say it is still undecided whether lottery will apply to those posts.

SPs are typically posted for three years. Based on yesterday’s changes, most newly appointed officers are expected to serve during the February national election, though once the election schedule is announced, the Election Commission will assume full authority and may transfer officials as needed.

At the Secretariat yesterday, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said districts had been categorised as A, B, and C based on law-and-order considerations. “We first identified the districts, then matched SPs accordingly,” he said. “From the 64 districts, we removed 18 SPs and appointed new officers in their places. Once the categories were set, the lottery decided who would go where.”

He added that the lottery was held only among shortlisted, highly qualified officers.

Officials involved said the aim was to place dedicated and skilled officers in critical positions ahead of the election. Intelligence units spent over a month vetting officers, including those who had benefited under the previous government. Officers who held high command roles during the 2014, 2018, and

2024 elections were excluded.

The reshuffle followed several rounds of meetings at the ministry and police headquarters amid tensions over competing demands and internal lobbying.

Former IGP Muhammad Nurul Huda criticised the move, arguing that quality and experience are crucial in SP postings and “a lottery system cannot ensure that level of judgment”.

He said a committee could have selected competent officers and replaced them if needed after observing their performance.

Crime analysts also warned that the approach may backfire.

Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University, said districts differ widely in crime profiles, and “new officers will struggle without experience. A lottery can also be manipulated.”

He said professional appointments “cannot rely on chance”, adding that qualified officers risk being sidelined when experienced leadership is essential.

Several police officers voiced frustration, saying some who had already served as district SPs were re-selected, while others promoted years ago still have no district postings. Some alleged that certain officers obtained desirable districts despite facing allegations. “This lottery cannot guarantee impartiality,” said one SP-level officer. Another officer from the 28th batch said many of his batchmates, promoted three years ago, still have no district assignments. “We hoped the interim

government would ensure fairness. Instead, the way this was done has left us frustrated.”

A police headquarters officer also questioned the logic of the process. “A-category SPs are moving to other A-category districts, and the same for B and C. What does the lottery really achieve? It appears to have been done mainly to accommodate 18 new SPs.”

At a ministry meeting last Saturday, districts were classified into 27 A-category, 28 B-category, and nine C-category areas. A-category districts include Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Munshiganj, Jashore, Jhenidah, Satkhira, Chattogram, Cox’s Bazar, and Cumilla – considered crucial because of crime patterns, economic activity, and social sensitivity.

Pabna, Sirajganj, Brahmanbaria, Narsingdi, Kushtia, Faridpur, Khulna, Barguna, and Pirojpur fall under B-category, while Gopalganj, Narail, Rajbari, Lalmonirhat, and Gaibandha are among C-category districts.

The reshuffle has also caused anxiety among OCs, whose postings will be determined through a lottery next week. Many have been in their posts only three to four months and fear removal, while allegations persist that some obtained postings through money or influence.

Asked about the need for such a sweeping overhaul, AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (media) at Police Headquarters, said the move was a government decision.

4th fire in 2yrs exposes deadly structural flaws

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Flamed tore through the tightly packed shanties, feeding on wooden frames, garbage, and tangled electrical lines. Nineteen fire service units fought the blaze through the night and finally brought it fully under control around 9:30am yesterday, nearly 16 hours later.

But the damage was immense. According to fire service, the fire destroyed 1,338 houses, leaving around 6,000 people homeless. At least 50 shops and part of a mosque was also gutted.

The cause of the fire remains unclear, and there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Both locals and firefighters said fires in Korail are difficult to contain quickly because of the settlement’s geography, congestion, and poor infrastructure.

“It took almost 35 minutes to reach the slum after the call came in because of the narrow lanes and severe traffic congestion,” said Lt Col Tajul Islam Chowdhury, director (operations) of the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

“Large engines could not enter. We had to drag hoses from a distance. By the time our teams got close, the flames had already spread to a large area,” he told The Daily Star.

Dense electrical wiring and exploding gas cylinders fuelled the fire further, he added.

Residents also said firefighters cannot arrive on time because of the layout of the slum.

“Walk through these lanes, and you will understand. Even a rickshaw struggles here. How will a fire engine enter?” said Azmat Ali, a resident.

The slum in sits wedged between the affluent neighbourhoods of Gulshan and Banani, and is flanked

by clusters of upscale apartment towers.

On Tuesday evening, as the sun set, orange flames rose into the night sky, and heavy smoke blanketed the area as people fled with whatever belongings they could carry.

Fifteen-year-old Russel remembered the chaos vividly. “Everyone ran at once. There wasn’t enough space to get out. Fire service members had to fight their way inside,” he said.

Around 10:00am yesterday, a large section of the settlement was found buried under piles of charred wood, twisted tin, and ash. Even after 17 hours, smoke still rose from pockets beneath the debris, filling the area with a strong stench.

Crowds of affected residents searched through the ruins, looking for anything they could salvage.

Police maintained heavy deployment at the entry points, while several organisations distributed food.

Many residents spent the night without shelter at the Khamarbari Eidgah field, the Ershad School field, and the Mohakhali T&T ground. At Pallibandhu Ershad Shishu Kalyan Primary School, hundreds took refuge in Red Cross tents and classrooms.

Rima Akter stood silently at the site of her burnt home, holding her eight-month-old son, Rafsan. “The fire started from an electrical short in front of our home,” she said. “Then a gas cylinder exploded. Another cylinder burst on the second floor. After that, I ran out with my son and daughter.”

However, officials are yet to determine the origin of the fire.

Meanwhile, the Fire Service and Civil Defence formed a five-member

committee, headed by Deputy Director (Operation & Maintenance) Mamunur Rashid, to investigate the fire. The committee has 15 working days to submit its findings.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief yesterday began distributing emergency relief to the affected families.

Md Enayet Hossain, information and public relations officer of the ministry, said it has provided 1,900 packets of dry food along with blankets, mosquito nets, and other essential supplies. The relief operations will continue today.

It was the fourth major fire in Korail since 2023. On February 21 this year, a midnight fire burned down at least a dozen homes. Fires also broke out on March 24 and December 18 last year, leaving hundreds homeless.

Each incident exposed the same weaknesses: narrow lanes, flammable materials, inaccessible homes, and delayed response times.

Lt Col Tajul Islam said most fires in the slum are caused by electrical short circuits or gas stove leakages.

Prof Adil Muhammad Khan, president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said the structural barriers leave firefighters with few options.

“We need vehicles that can enter narrow lanes. At the same time, community volunteer teams must be formed, trained, and equipped so they can take initial action before the fire spreads,” he said.

Tajul Islam said fire drills are conducted regularly in Korail. “A drill had been completed only days earlier, which allowed crews to work more efficiently. Otherwise, it might have taken two to three hours more to control the fire.”

Bad loans continue

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unprecedented jump in bad loans.

Bad loans stood at Tk 2.82 lakh crore at the end of September last year, meaning defaulted loans increased by Tk 3.61 lakh crore in just one year.

After August 5 last year, many businessmen fled the country and many of their businesses shut down, which pushed up bad loans, said the chief executive of a private bank.

“Ahead of the upcoming election, an atmosphere of uncertainty is prevailing in the country, which is hindering trade and commerce. Because of these factors, many good companies have turned into defaulters,” he added.

Due to the high volume of defaulted loans, the banking sector is facing a significant provisioning shortfall: Tk 3.44 lakh crore until September.

“This is not a good sign,” said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and CEO of Mutual Trust Bank.

Banks’ profitability will decline and the funds available for lending will shrink due to the high bad loans, said Rahman, also the former chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a platform of bank MDs.

However, defaulted loans may decrease in December because the central bank has introduced policy support. Many defaulted loans are being

rescheduled.

Recovery needs to be strengthened, he said.

“Legal procedures must be made faster. More courts and more judges are needed. But the challenge is that the election is ahead, so business conditions are weak,” he added.

About 35 percent of the loans are now classified as non-performing, a level that has far-reaching effects, said Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management.

When defaulted loans rise, banks earn less as they have to set aside larger provisions. This leads to the erosion of their capital base.

“As a result, foreign investors think twice, and international banks raise transaction charges. The country must come out of this situation. Exemplary punishment should be ensured for loan defaulters.”

The higher figure partly reflects the central bank’s decision to classify loans in line with international standards, he said.

In 1999, bad loans in the banking sector stood at a record 41.1 percent, the highest on record.

Since then, the ratio began to decline and fell to 6.1 percent in 2011.

Govt promotes

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Some of the judges are likely to be included in the electoral inquiry committees.

The committees are tasked with investigating complaints, irregularities, and allegations during elections. They collect evidence, examine reports from polling centres, and submit findings to the EC to ensure accountability and transparency.

Law ministry sources said the large-scale promotions, postings and transfers were carried out for several reasons, including the imminent announcement of the national election schedule.

Once the election schedule is announced, such transfers or promotions may create complications in election duties. And the Election Commission may not be able to work

smoothly if officers responsible for election duties are transferred then, said the sources.

They said files regarding the promotions and postings of judges had been pending for several years. The lower courts will also go into a month-long annual civil vacation from December 2, prompting authorities to complete the process before the break.

The sources said the decisions were taken as routine work in consultation with the Supreme Court.

The law ministry cannot make such reshuffles in the judiciary once the Supreme Court secretariat is established. The interim government on November 20 granted final approval to the draft Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, 2025.

Referendum

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them, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star.

“Therefore, all of these responsibilities ultimately rest with the government.”

Salahuddin warned that people might become confused and assume that everyone agreed with the proposal exactly as laid out in the order and Referendum Ordinance.

“Is it right to impose such a question on the people? With all these complicated issues at stake, reducing everything to a single one-word answer of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is ultimately a kind of coercion.”

The party is committed to implementing the version of the July National Charter it signed on October 17.

“Outside of this, no law, no order and no proposal can be used to limit or reduce the sovereignty of parliament over the parties that signed the charter.”

The BNP has already raised questions about the government’s steps outside the signed July charter, he added.

Although the party objects to the referendum question, it is keeping a cautious stance for now, as its demand to hold the referendum alongside the national polls has been met.

Some standing committee members said that as the government proceeds with the referendum without settling the issues raised by the BNP, it might lead to complications.

Some warned that supporting the referendum could create political complications for the BNP.

REFERENDUM ORDINANCE

The government yesterday issued

the Referendum Ordinance 2025 to conduct the referendum on the July National Charter.

The ordinance includes a provision allowing the Election Commission to use the same ballot boxes as in the general election for the referendum.

In addition, a separate coloured ballot paper will be used specifically for the referendum.

For the first time, expatriates will be able to cast their votes in the referendum through postal ballots.

Election officials from the national polls will also serve as officials for the referendum.

The process will follow the same voter list, polling centres, polling hours, balloting method and procedures for announcing results as the general election.

The referendum will be held on a single question, though it will cover four aspects of constitutional reforms.

The government on November 13 decided that the national election and the July charter referendum would be held on the same day.

Upon receiving the government’s directive to hold a referendum, the EC began exploring measures to ensure both votes proceed smoothly.

Bangladesh has held three referendums to date. The 1977 and 1985 referendums took place under the governments of Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad, respectively, while the 1991 referendum marked the country’s return to parliamentary democracy.

The first two referendums were held under the Referendum Orders of 1977 and 1985, and the third under the Referendum Act of 1991.