

People won't vote for corrupt representatives, extortionists

Says Islami Andolan ameer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

People will not vote for corrupt people and extortionists in the upcoming national election, said Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim.

"Corrupted individuals and extortionists will have no place in Bangladesh. People will reject them through their votes," he said while speaking as chief guest at the Barishal divisional rally of the like-minded eight parties at Barishal's Bell's Park.

The country would get rid of extortion, injustice, violence and money laundering, if the Islamic parties are voted to power, he said.

"We have seen BNP, Awami League and Jatiya Party, but we have not seen Islam. For once, bring us to parliament for the sake of Islam. If that happens, no more mothers will lose their sons, there will be no extortion, and no armed thugs," said Rezaul.

At the end of his speech, Rezaul prayed for immediate recovery of political leaders, including BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.



Despite multiple eviction drives at various times, encroachers have again erected illegal structures over the Kutubkhali canal in the capital's Jatrahari. Unabated encroachment and continuous dumping of solid waste have long plagued the canal. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Only army can bring peace in CHT

FROM PAGE 1

Iftekharuzzaman said he has already informed the government clearly and in writing that this is the time for the army to reflect on its role.

"The Bangladesh Army has proudly played a role in peacekeeping missions in 169 countries. The people of the country, including me, are proud of this. At this moment, the Bangladesh Army is working in at least 10 countries to help establish peace and is making significant contributions that have received international recognition."

He questioned why the army cannot establish peace in a part of Bangladesh that is already under its own authority. He said the army should answer this question itself.

"It is an opportunity for the army to improve its national and international acceptance, credibility, and respect."

The TIB executive director added that the army is capable of bringing peace to the hill tracts on its own initiative, even without support from the government.

"I believe that if the army has the will, all parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord can be implemented.

No past government has been able to do this. Even the most powerful and authoritarian government that ruled the country for the last 15 years could not do it."

The authority necessary for establishing peace will only work if the army decides to make real efforts, Iftekharuzzaman added.

TIB Research fellow Razia Sultana presented the research findings at the event on the challenges indigenous communities face in accessing social safety net programmes.

According to the study, indigenous people in both the plains and the hilly areas often remain excluded from government support schemes.

Many do not get accurate information about available services and face discrimination, corruption, and administrative complexities.

The report said language barriers, poor communication facilities, mobile network problems, and limited internet access cause serious difficulties.

In many places, officials do not follow proper rules while selecting beneficiaries, leaving vulnerable indigenous households without

assistance.

The report added that poverty, land loss, political influence, social inequality, and geographical isolation further increase vulnerability.

Many families lack the required documents, such as national identity cards or birth certificates, which prevent them from enrolling in social safety programmes.

Some applicants face harassment, delays, and demands for bribes. Others avoid applying because they fear discrimination or feel discouraged by repeated refusals.

TIB, the Bangladesh chapter of the Germany-based global anti-graft watchdog, recommended ensuring fair access to services, improving coordination among government bodies, increasing the use of information technology, and raising awareness among local officials.

The organisation urged the government to include indigenous voices in decision-making, strengthen monitoring, and ensure transparency.

It also called for long-term planning to make social safety schemes more inclusive and effective.

Basu Bahini: The fierce guerrilla force

FROM PAGE 1

Kishoreganj and Habiganj and spoke to at least 25 fighters and villagers who once sought shelter under their protection.

Before the war, Basu had been a notorious robber, jailed in Kishoreganj in several murder cases. When students and youths broke open the prison at the end of March, he returned to Gurui village in Nikli and rallied his men and any local willing to fight.

After the Pakistani army captured Bajitpur on April 18, 1971, Sangram Committee member Prof Yakub Mia summoned Basu to his home in Chhaychira.

Bahini member Abdul Wahab, 77, told The Daily Star that Prof Yakub initially hesitated to trust a former dacoit, but confidence grew. The first camp was set up at the Gurui Union Parishad with 45 fighters.

In May, the Basu Bahini trained for two weeks at Ujlabar camp in Belabo, Narsingdi, then based themselves in a house in Hilchia near Gurui. They opened their operations by killing two notorious collaborators in the haor, according to the book.

From there, actions unfolded in quick succession: the June 25 attack on Bajitpur Police Station; the July 20 operation on Nikli Thana; the battles at Scaldah crematorium on July 25 and Manikkali Duilja Bridge on July 30; and the National Bank operation in Bajitpur.

Before dawn on June 25, hundreds of Basu Bahini fighters surrounded the Bajitpur Police Station, where Pakistani forces and Razakars took shelter.

Abdul Hekim, 82, a member of the Basu Bahini, recalled, "A seven-hour battle raged until the Razakars and police ran out of ammunition and fled through a tunnel to the OC's house, where they were captured." Crowds then stormed the market, seized the captives, and beat them to death.

Around the same time, Basu's men blew up the railway bridge between Gachihata and Manikkhali in Katiadi to disrupt Pakistani movements.

In mid-July, Basu's men escorted the wife and children of war-time acting President Syed Nazrul Islam from Nikli towards India. Razakars ambushed them at Ratari Haor in Sunamganj, but eight Razakars were killed in a counter attack and one was captured, said Wahab.

On September 6, disoriented by the Bahini's repeated strikes, Pakistani soldiers and Razakars entered Gurui by launch, looting and burning homes. After villagers alerted the Hilchia

camp, 20-25 fighters ambushed them, killing five soldiers, said Yusuf Ali, another member of the Bahini.

"When our fighters ran out of ammunition and withdrew, the army torched homes and massacred at least 25 villagers in Gurui Bazar. As they retreated by launch, 40-50 of our men attacked again, killing 15-16 Pakistani soldiers and Razakars. After that, Gurui, Hilchia, and nearby villages became liberated areas," Yusuf said.

Other Basu Bahini battles included the Bagamara Bridge operation; attacks at Nikli and Madan thanas; attacks on Pakistani trawlers at Chhatirchar; the Sararchar train

Razakars and Al-Badr surrendered on December 17," he said.

The Basu Bahini surrendered their weapons to the Kishoreganj subdistrict administration on January 26, 1972.

SAKINA BEGUM: COOK TO SPY Among them was Sakhina Begum. She spoke with The Daily Star just two weeks before she died in June 2025 at the age of 93. She began as a cook in the Hilchia camp and then became a spy for the freedom fighters. Detained twice by the Pakistani army and Razakars, but she escaped both times.

"After my nephew, freedom fighter Matiur Rahman, was killed at Nikli,



Abdul Motalib Basu



Sakhina Begum



Yusuf Ali



Abdul Wahab

I took a vow to fight. When three Razakars were captured in Bajitpur, I brought them to Hilchia camp and hacked all three to death," she said.

She said she later killed two more Razakars with the same dagger, now kept at the Liberation War Museum.

THE BASU FAMILY Despite 25 criminal cases, Basu received general amnesty for his wartime role. He joined the Awami League in 1972, but a faction rejected him. Later that year, members of that faction shot him and drowned his body in the Ghorautra River.

He left behind his wife, two sons, and a daughter. Today, his ailing wife and daughter live in a small tin house in Gurui; all family property was seized after his death. When this reporter visited in May, his wife lay on the floor on a torn kantha. His daughter, Rahima Khatun, 58, widowed within three years of marriage, works as a domestic help in her village while also caring for her mother.

Basu's son Nazrul, 60, used the freedom fighter's allowance to build his own tin house. The mother and daughter said they do not receive any monthly allowance either.

Researcher Sukhen Dutta, who has spent 12 years studying the Basu Bahini, said: "The Liberation War transformed a notorious robber into a man wholly devoted to his motherland. The contribution of the Basu Bahini in the haor battles deserves to be written in golden letters."

Tarique's return rests on Khaleda's health condition

FROM PAGE 1

yet to request a "travel pass".

"It will be issued as soon as he asks for it," Touhid said while talking to reporters in the capital.

Regarding security concerns for Tarique, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the home ministry is ready to provide special protection to anyone who requires it.

'AVOID RUMOURS'

Talking to the reporters, Zahid, on behalf of Khaleda's family and the party, urged everyone not to pay attention to or spread any rumours about her health.

He also appealed to journalists to remain patient, saying, "You have stood by us... With your support and by the grace of Allah, Madam Khaleda Zia will recover."

Zahid said only he and party leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi are authorised to brief the media on Khaleda's health.

"I request everyone not to listen to statements from anyone else about her condition, as that only fuels rumours."

SSF PROTECTION

Members of the Special Security Force (SSF) and President's Guard Regiment (PGR) were deployed at Evercare Hospital yesterday, a day after the government declared

Khaleda a "very, very important person" or "VVIP".

In the early hours, police set up a barricade outside the hospital and took positions at the main entrance.

For security and travel convenience, the government has declared her a "VVIP".

Worried and anxious party activists gathered outside the hospital throughout the day yesterday to enquire about Khaleda's health, despite repeated instructions from the BNP not to crowd the area.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman was among those who visited the hospital yesterday. After his visit, he said, "I feel some comfort, as I was able to see her with my own eyes. We are praying for her recovery."

PRAYERS

The advisory council, chaired by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, in a special meeting, decided that the government would extend any assistance necessary for Khaleda's treatment.

During the meeting yesterday, prayers were offered for Khaleda's recovery, and the nation was urged to pray for her as well.

Meanwhile, at different parts of the country, special prayers were offered for her swift recovery.

How salinity sank Satkhira farmers' harvests

FROM PAGE 1

The once-thriving rice fields and freshwater fish farms of Satkhira's coastal plains, crisscrossed by rivers and canals, are disappearing amid an advancing tide of salinity, driven by rising seas, cyclones, tidal surges, and a changing climate.

As harvests dwindled and profits shrank, shrimp cultivation crept in, promising quick returns but deepening the crisis. Vast stretches of farmland, ponds, and canals are now saturated with salt, forcing thousands of farmers like Majed to abandon traditional crops.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Satkhira, comprising seven upazilas, covers an area of 3.81 lakh hectares, of which 2.26 lakh hectares are arable land.

At least 1.53 lakh hectares, including 73,000 hectares used for shrimp farming, have been affected by varying degrees of salinity.

Salinity levels in both soil and water fluctuate with the change of seasons, rising in the dry months and dropping during the monsoon.

A recent report by the Satkhira office of Soil Resources Development Institute shows soil salinity has increased sharply over the past five years.

Take Shyamnagar, for instance. Salinity in the soil was measured at 3.9 deciSiemens per metre (dS/m) in the upazila in January 2021 against the tolerable limit of 6 dS/m. It doubled to 8.12 dS/m in the same month this year, according to the report.

If soil salinity levels exceed 4 dS/m, crop yields begin to fall.

Farmers say last year's harvest was severely hit by salinity.

"I cultivated rice on 20 bighas of land. But excessive salinity ruined about 20 percent of the crop, resulting in a significant financial loss," said Mohammad Alauddin, a farmer in Kaliganj.

Rice cultivation in Satkhira has been in decline over the past 15 years, according to data from the DAE Satkhira office.

Aus acreage plunged from 12,265 hectares in 2010 to 6,610 hectares last year. Aman cultivation also shrank, dropping from 104,820 hectares to

88,650 hectares over the same period. However, Boro acreage saw a rise, edging up from 73,640 hectares to 80,795 hectares.

PUSH TOWARDS SHRIMP FARMING

Branded as "white gold", shrimp farming took root in the 1980s in three southwestern districts – Satkhira, Khulna and Bagerhat. With hopes of high profits and export earnings, farmers embraced farming of tiger shrimp (bagda) and giant freshwater prawns (golda), sparking an unplanned boom that reshaped the landscape.

Wealthy and politically influential landowners started carving out massive ponds, often breaching embankments to draw saline river water into the fields. Soon, vast stretches of farmland were converted into ghers in Shyamnagar, Kaliganj, Debhata and Assasuni of Satkhira.

With shrimp enclosures multiplying, saline water seeped into fields. Freshwater ecosystems that sustained generations of farmers began collapsing. As repeated attempts to grow crops failed and the lure of quick income grew stronger, many farmers switched to shrimp farming.

"As plot after plot was turned into shrimp enclosures, I simply could not help but shift to aquaculture," said Akbar Hossain from Paschim Singhortoli village.

A septuagenarian from Burigoalini said that wealthy locals bought – and in some cases grabbed – land and water bodies for ghers.

Repeated cyclones and tidal surges over the last couple of decades worsened the crisis, breaching embankments and inundating fields with saline water. In the aftermath, many struggled to grow crops and turned to shrimp farming instead.

"We were badly hit by cyclone Aila in 2009 when my land had been submerged for months. Then, cyclone Amphan made things worse. I started shrimp farming by taking loans, just to survive," said Anwar Hossain, a resident of Pratapnagar in Shyamnagar upazila.

Women have been among the worst affected. Many who once planted, weeded and harvested paddies now collect shrimp fry in brackish waters or

work inside ghers, often suffering skin diseases and waterborne illnesses.

With aquatic diseases in shrimp farms leading to heavy losses and debts, many farmers wish to return to rice cultivation, but salinity has made their lands unfit for growing crops.

"We thought shrimp would bring prosperity, but repeated aquatic diseases wiped out our savings. I want to grow rice again, but the soil is no longer suitable for the crop," said Abidul Islam from Shyamnagar.

A RAY OF HOPE

Yet, there are signs of resilience. Farmers in some parts of the coastal belt are experimenting with salt-tolerant rice and vegetables – crop varieties that can withstand high salinity.

"We lost hope when our fields became too saline for growing paddy. With salt-tolerant rice varieties, we can now at least grow something again," said Anwar Hossain, a farmer in Kaliganj.

But many farmers still lack awareness and support.

Saiful Islam, deputy director of the DAE in Satkhira, said they are promoting crop diversification and supporting farmers with adaptive techniques.

"During the Boro season [from October to March], we advise farmers to plant early so that crops are exposed to salinity for a shorter period," he said.

When salinity levels drop after the monsoon, the department recommends planting resilient rice varieties such as BRRI dhan 67, 93, 97 and BINA dhan 10.

Farmers are also encouraged to dig small ponds beside fields to store freshwater for irrigation during the dry months. "We have been trying to boost yields along the fringes of the ghers during the Boro season," Saiful said.

Experts say climate-resilient agriculture – from introducing new varieties of salt-tolerant seeds to re-excavating freshwater canals – is essential to help the farmers in the region recover.

They believe the crisis can be partly managed through timely information, training, and widespread adoption of salt-tolerant crops.

[Our Satkhira correspondent contributed to this report]

CONVICTION OF TULIP

ACC defends trial process

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Corruption Commission yesterday issued a clarification following concerns raised in recent media reports about the trial and sentencing of UK Labour MP Tulip Siddiq.

The ACC in its statement said it reviewed all prosecution materials filed against Tulip in corruption cases involving her and members of the former prime minister's family.

It said Tulip was allotted an additional plot during her aunt's tenure as head of government and the case is pending. Ousted prime minister Hasina, her sister Rehana and their children, including Tulip, absconded to evade trial, it said.

The commission said in special case no. 18, Tulip was found guilty of influencing her aunt to secure land for her mother and siblings. The prosecution examined 32 witnesses, several of whom testified under oath that Tulip used her influence to have the plot allotted. Their testimonies, along with circumstantial evidence, showed she was "deeply involved in the illegal process".

According to the statement, such actions constitute abetment under several sections of the Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947.

It added that Tulip obtained a plot in Gulshan by wielding influence over her aunt.

The ACC said Tulip had also been linked to London properties purchased through offshore companies. It rejected her claim that she was unable to respond to the charges, saying she had the opportunity to attend the trial but declined to appear or appoint representation, leading to her being tried in absentia.

Deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and her niece Tulip Siddiq were sentenced in absentia on Monday over corruption in the allocation of Purbachal plots. Tulip Siddiq told The Guardian that the ruling "deserves contempt" and called the entire process "flawed and farcical".

AVIJIT MURDER

Convict on death row was forcibly disappeared, alleges brother

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The brother of Mozammel Hossain Saimon, on death row for murdering writer-blogger Avijit Roy, yesterday said that law enforcers have illegally confined him, threatened to kill him in "crossfire" and coerced him into making a false confession.

Saimon's brother Abdullah Hossain, along with nine other individuals who were allegedly forcibly disappeared for periods ranging from three to 18 months during the Awami League tenure, filed separate complaints with ICT Prosecutor Tareq Abdullah against five former officials of Rab-1 and Rab-7, including Additional SP Alep Uddin.

Alep is the only officer currently in custody.

The allegations were disclosed yesterday by Abdul Kaiyum, secretary of the Voice of Enforced Disappearance Persons (VOED), during a press briefing on the premises of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT).

Nine victims and Saimon's brother stood beside him. Kaiyum said Saimon remains behind bars.

Contacted, prosecutor Tareq confirmed receiving the complaints on Tuesday.