

Choose honest, capable candidates
Yunus urges voters

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday urged voters to cast their ballots freely and thoughtfully in the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for February 12.

"You are the owner of the country. You will decide who will run this country on your behalf for the next five years. Vote for the candidate of your choice. Choose an honest and capable candidate. Vote thoughtfully," he said.

The chief adviser made the remarks in a video message at the inaugural ceremony of 10 voting vehicles, known as the "Super Caravan", launched to conduct a nationwide campaign on the election and referendum.

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Senior Secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat Akhtar Ahmed, and Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam formally inaugurated the voting vehicles at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the afternoon.

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Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus speaks at the inauguration of 10 voting vehicles, known as the "Super Caravan", launched to conduct a nationwide campaign on the election and referendum. The vehicles will travel across all 64 districts and 300 upazilas. The event was held at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

'Govt failing to stop violence against minorities'
Claim community leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of minority organisations yesterday alleged that the government had failed to stop violence, killings and persecution of minority communities.

Addressing a human chain organised by the Minority Unity Front in front of Jatiya Press Club, minority leaders said the lack of proper investigations and justice had created fear and mistrust across the country.

Manindra Kumar Nath, joint coordinator of the Minority Unity Front, said the government did not contact the family of Dipu Chandra Das, who was "beaten and burned to death" in Bhaluka, Mymensingh, on December 18 following allegations of "religious blasphemy".

Referring to the chief adviser, Manindra said he had claimed he would build a humane Bangladesh, which, he alleged, had not happened.

He also alleged that minorities had been facing continued persecution since the government assumed power.

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BANGLADESH-MALAYSIA
Syndicates still dominate migration corridor: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Repeated policy reforms and bilateral agreements with Malaysia have failed to break the control of recruitment syndicates, speakers said at a national dialogue yesterday.

As a result, migrant workers continue to face deception, high migration costs, debt bondage and abuse, they added.

The dialogue, titled "Bangladesh-Malaysia Labour Migration Corridor: Why the Syndicate Prevails, and Exploitation in Recruitment Persists!", was organised by the Ovbashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Center in the capital.

The event was held under the Strengthened and Informative Migration

Systems project, funded by the Embassy of Switzerland and supported by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh.

In his welcome remarks, OKUP Program Coordinator Md Abdullah Al Mamun Nasim said there must be an honest reflection on why past recruitment models have failed to protect workers.

Helvetas advocacy expert Shamayla Mahbub said exploitation would continue unless structural flaws in the system were addressed.

OKUP Chairperson Shakirul Islam highlighted the long history of the Bangladesh-Malaysia migration corridor and the heavy social and economic costs borne by migrant workers and their families due to non-transparent recruitment processes.

Sharing his experience,

returnee migrant worker Niranjan said, "I migrated to Malaysia through a broker and paid Tk 500,000. At the airport, the broker forced us to declare a much higher amount. After a few months, the employer disappeared. When we protested, we were deported."

"This system destroys workers' lives," he said.

Prothom Alo journalist Mohiuddin Niloy said recruitment syndicates operate on both sides of the corridor.

Marina Sultana of RMMRU questioned why Bangladesh repeatedly yields authority to destination countries instead of managing the migration corridor more assertively.

From the Malaysian side, Adrian Pereira of the North South Initiative said corruption and a lack of

political will remained major obstacles.

"There is no protection for whistle-blowers, and large sums of money are involved. Without strong political commitment, reform is unlikely," he said.

Zia Hassan, policy advisor at the expatriates' welfare ministry, described the corridor as an "organised crime structure".

Migration expert Sheepa Hafiza urged the government to conduct a root-cause analysis rather than relying on short-term fixes.

Another migration expert, Asif Munir, stressed the need for systemic reform, reintegration support for returnee migrants, and stronger joint advocacy by Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Law and order will improve ahead of polls

Hope CEC, BNP at meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said the country's law and order situation would gradually improve ahead of the election and referendum scheduled for February 12 next year.

The CEC made the remarks while talking to reporters after inspecting the process of sending postal ballots to overseas voters at the Teigaon Post Office.

Responding to questions about the law and order situation following the recent killing of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi, also an aspirant from Dhaka-8, the CEC said there was no reason for fear.

"The law and order situation will improve as polling day draws closer," he said, reiterating that the election and referendum would be held in a "festive" atmosphere.

Meanwhile, a three-member BNP delegation met the CEC at the Election Commission around 3:00pm yesterday.

After the meeting, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said maintaining law and order during the election period

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Frame charges against Anisul and Salman

Prosecution urges ICT-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) yesterday sought the framing of charges against former law minister Anisul Huq and Salman F Rahman, former adviser to ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in a crimes against humanity case filed over killings during the July uprising.

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam made the prayer before ICT-1 after completing the prosecution's hearing on the charges.

According to the formal charge, both Anisul and Salman have been accused under the doctrine of command responsibility. The prosecution alleged that they facilitated and instigated killings during the uprising.

During the hearing, the chief prosecutor read out the charges before the tribunal.

The charges allege that Anisul and Salman held a phone conversation during the uprising in which they said protesters should be "finished off" by imposing a curfew.

Based on the alleged conversation, indiscriminate shooting of students took place in Dhaka and other districts during the student-led movement, the prosecution said.

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Electric three-wheelers must be regulated

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Citing two studies, he said the modal share of rickshaws in Dhaka city was 38.7 percent in 2009, which declined to 30.1 percent in 2023, but remains significant.

The rapid and unregulated expansion has generated multiple concerns, highlighting the urgent need for an organised, regulated and compliant urban transport system, he said.

There is no comprehensive policy in Bangladesh that describes all the aspects of E3Ws.

Most of the vehicles use lead-acid batteries, which have severe health impacts during their informal recycling.

Since the expansion of the vehicles was not controlled in the initial phases, they cannot be banned overnight, as they have become part of the transport system and involve a large number of people, Moazzam said.

Therefore, the vehicles must be strictly regulated and phased out gradually.

"But further expansion of these vehicles must be stopped."

The CPD carried out the study and organised the programme to discuss how E3Ws could be made more sustainable, brought under regulation and integrated into the urban transport system, Moazzam added.

About 60 lakh people are directly involved in the sector, said Khalequzzaman Lipon, convener of the Rickshaw, Battery-Powered Rickshaw-Van, and Easy Bike Sangram Parishad.

They have been demanding a comprehensive guideline to regulate the industry for over a decade, but to no avail.

Instead of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), which is responsible for regulating motor vehicles, the Local Government Division is now preparing a guideline even though it is not within its jurisdiction.

"We want a single guideline led by BRTA," he added.

E3Ws have become popular for their speed, relatively less fare and ability to carry more passengers than traditional rickshaws, but they are accident-prone and contribute to traffic congestion, said Asif-Uz-Zaman Khan, a professor at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology's Urban and Regional Planning department.

These vehicles must be strictly regulated with a uniform and safe design and dedicated roads, he said, adding that the use of lead-acid batteries in the rickshaws must be stopped.

The vehicles must be brought under strict regulation or else they will spiral out of control, said Kabir Ahmed, Bangladesh Planning Commission's chief of Physical Infrastructure Division.

Neelima Akhter, executive director of the Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority, emphasised the need to implement existing laws to bring discipline to the sector.

BRTA Director Md Shahidullah and LGD Joint Secretary Khondoker Nazmul Huda Shamim said their respective ministries are preparing separate guidelines for E3Ws, exposing a lack of coordination.

Tarique to register as voter Dec 27

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Despite living abroad, Tarique was appointed BNP acting chairman in 2016 after his mother Khaleda Zia was imprisoned.

Officials said the EC prepared a voter list with photographs ahead of the December 2008 polls, but Tarique was not enrolled as he was abroad. He has not been included in subsequent voter lists prepared ahead of the 2014, 2018, and 2024 elections.

PREPARATIONS

BNP is preparing a stage in the 300-foot area in Purbachal to hold a reception programme marking the arrival of Tarique, where he is expected to address party leaders, activists, and supporters.

Party sources said the area was chosen with security in mind.

They added that BNP has already obtained permission for the programme from the Dhaka divisional commissioner.

Ahead of Tarique's arrival, the party is making arrangements for a large gathering of leaders and activists from across the country at Dhaka airport, the 300 feet area in Purbachal, and nearby locations.

BNP has already hired trains to facilitate travel to Dhaka, while party leaders have been assigned specific responsibilities to manage crowds at different points.

Sources said that, considering the overall security situation, the party has expressed interest in receiving Special Security Force (SSF) protection for the programme, and discussions with the

government in this regard are currently underway.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway will operate special trains on 10 routes and attach additional coaches to several regular trains to facilitate the travel of BNP leaders, activists, and supporters to Dhaka on December 25.

As a result, the services of three short-distance trains -- Rajbari Commuter (Rajbari-Poradah), Dhalarchar Express (Pabna-Rajshahi), and Rohanpur Commuter (Rohanpur-Rajshahi) -- will remain suspended on that day, according to a press release issued by the Railways Ministry.

The ministry expressed regret for the temporary inconvenience caused to passengers due to the one-day suspension of services.

The special trains will

operate on the following routes: Cox's Bazar-Dhaka, Cox's Bazar-Jamalpur-Mymensingh-Dhaka, Jamalpur-Tangail-Dhaka, Tangail-Bhairab Bazar-Narsingdi-Dhaka, Narsingdi-Bhairab Bazar, Joydebpur-Dhaka Cantonment-Joydebpur (Gazipur), Panchagarh-Dhaka-Panchagarh, Khulna-Dhaka-Khulna, Chatochar-Dhaka Cantonment-Chatochar, Rajshahi-Dhaka-Rajshahi, and Jashore-Dhaka-Jashore.

BR is expected to earn around Tk 36 lakh from this arrangement. As a condition for travel on the special trains and additional coaches, party leaders and activists have been instructed to comply with the election code of conduct.

from political parties to ensure a peaceful election.

The signatories include Anu Muhammad, former professor of Jahangirnagar University; Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh; Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of CAMPE; Shireen Huq, member of Naripokkho; Shahdeen Malik, senior advocate at the Supreme Court; Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST; photographer Shahidul Alam; Samina Luthfa, a sociology professor at Dhaka University; Shamsul Huda, executive director of ALRD; and Taslima Islam, acting chief executive of BELA, among others.

32 citizens demand justice for Hadi

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questioned how such a situation was allowed to occur.

"The nation wants to know from the government why and how this happened."

The signatories also strongly condemned the incidents of December 18, when the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star came under what they termed pre-planned attacks involving looting and arson late at night.

They further referred to the arson attack on the Chhayanaut building and the destruction of Nalanda school on the same night.

Expressing grave concern over a series of mob violence incidents, the statement cited the killing and burning of

Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh's Bhaluka over allegations of blasphemy.

It also mentioned an arson attack in Lakshmipur, where petrol was allegedly poured into a locked house, killing seven-year-old Ayesha Begum Binoti and injuring other family members.

The recent attacks on longstanding cultural organisations such as Udichi clearly showed that "none of these are isolated incidents".

The citizens alleged that many of the attacks had been preceded by open calls circulated on social media and questioned why law enforcement agencies remained "silent spectators" despite prior indications.

Recalling the commitments made by the interim government following the July Uprising, particularly pledges to ensure press freedom, freedom of expression and public safety, the signatories said the state has failed to uphold those assurances.

They pointed to repeated attacks in recent months on peaceful citizens, folk artists, baul performances, and individuals and organisations with differing opinions, religious beliefs or cultural identities.

The lack of accountability has deepened public fear and mistrust.

Against this backdrop, the statement questioned how a free, fair, transparent

and participatory election could be held.

The citizens placed six demands before the government, including the immediate arrest and speedy trial of Hadi's killers, fair and impartial investigations into other political killings and the identification and punishment of those responsible for attacks on Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Chhayanaut.

They also demanded strict action against attacks on cultural organisations and artists carried out in the name of "Tawhidi Janata", visible measures to curb organised and pre-planned violence, scrutiny of the role of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and a collective commitment

from political parties to ensure a peaceful election.

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NCP labour wing leader shot in Khulna

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at the scene. After breaking in, they discovered bloodstains, foreign liquor bottles, and equipment used for consuming yaba, along with an empty bullet shell.

He said the shooting likely stemmed from an internal dispute among those present at the house.

Footage from nearby CCTV cameras shows Sikder holding his injured head and walking out of the alley with assistance after the incident.

KMCH Superintendent Dr MD Akhtaruzzaman said Sikder's CT scan has been completed and he is currently out of danger, though another scan will be conducted as a precaution.

"The bullet hit the left side near his ear and exited without entering the head. His scalp was injured, but he is now stable and out of danger," the doctor said.

Protesting the incident, NCP Khulna district and metropolitan organiser Sajidul Islam Bappi alleged that Khulna has become a safe haven for criminals and demanded exemplary punishment for the attackers.

"We are investigating who used to visit the house. Since the tenants have fled, efforts are underway to trace them and uncover the motive behind the incident," the DC said.