

Level playing field absent

Say NCP, IAB after meeting CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party and Islami Andolan Bangladesh yesterday told the Election Commission that a level playing field remains absent in the country ahead of the February 12 polls, citing poor law and order and preferential treatment for some political parties.

After separate meetings with Chief Election Commissioner A M M Nasir Uddin, NCP highlighted the deteriorating law-and-order situation, while IAB said some parties are receiving VVIP protocol, undermining electoral fairness.

Following a meeting between a four-member NCP delegation and the CEC at the EC headquarters, NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan described the election-time law and order situation as "very disappointing".

"Since the day after the schedule was announced, we saw a marked criminal who had recently been released on bail, kill one of our

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A delegation led by EU Ambassador Michael Miller at a meeting with BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman at the party chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday evening.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

Indonesia flood kills 16, displaces hundreds

AFP, Jakarta

Torrential rains battered Indonesia's Siau island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people, with another three missing, authorities said yesterday.

An overflowing river flooded four towns on the small island north of Sulawesi on Monday, the national disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

"Sixteen people have been reported dead due to the flash flood," agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said, adding that teams were searching for the three missing.

He said 22 people were injured and nearly 700 villagers displaced.

"The flash flood was triggered by heavy-intensity rain that had drenched the area since the early hours, causing the river's water flow to surge suddenly," Abdul said.

Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed big rocks and uprooted trees that were swept away.

The flood cut off access to some roads and damaged dozens of homes as well as public buildings and infrastructure, the spokesman said.

Floods are common in Indonesia during the rainy season, which typically lasts between October and March.

'Homes for slum dwellers, safety for all'

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the cantonment areas. Acknowledging the differences in their needs, the party plans to approach each group with specific messaging.

These were discussed during a meeting, chaired by Tarique, of leaders and activists of the Dhaka-17.

The meeting started at 11:00am and ended at 1:00pm at the chairperson's Gulshan office.

According to the Election Commission, the constituency has 3,33,777 voters – 174,709 male, 159,060 female, and eight transgender.

A significant proportion of the voters come from marginalised communities, with slums such as Bhashantek, Karail, and Sattala playing a crucial role in influencing the election results.

Tarique, who returned home on December 25 after 17 years in exile, registered as a voter in ward-9 of Dhaka North City Corporation.

BNP's strategy in Dhaka-17 hinges on strengthening its existing support base in these communities, with promises of improved access to housing, healthcare, education, and public services.

At the meeting, leaders emphasised

the importance of securing permanent housing for slum dwellers, particularly those who have been living in the areas for three to five years.

"A policy will be adopted by BNP to ensure permanent housing for those who have lived in settlements for three to five years. If elected, this will be implemented," said a BNP leader, wishing not to be named.

They also highlighted the party's commitment to providing better access to sports facilities, healthcare, and school grounds for slum residents.

BNP leaders believe that slum dwellers historically show high voter participation. This makes slum voters a key target group in the party's campaign strategy.

A BNP leader, who attended the meeting, said, "After the Korail slum fire in November, party leaders and activists have prioritised these areas. Despite this, the BNP's performance in slum areas has not been as strong as expected."

The leader in the meeting urged the party to refocus its efforts on slum communities to maximise its chances of success.

The main rival for the BNP in Dhaka-17 is SM Khaliduzzaman from the Jamaat-e-Islami alliance.

As part of its election campaign, BNP leaders have planned door-to-door outreach in slum areas, promising to implement welfare programmes aimed at improving their living conditions.

Party insiders believe that Tarique's direct engagement with slum communities will strengthen the BNP's connection with the urban poor, boosting support for the party.

In Gulshan and Banani, local BNP leaders raised concerns about security, pollution, and the need for stricter regulations.

Discussions also focused on selecting polling agents, who will assist voters and monitor the election process.

Leaders from different units assured Tarique of their united support in the upcoming campaign.

"Slum voters will play a pivotal role in securing Tarique Rahman's victory. Our goal is to win with a decisive margin, and slum voters are central to this strategy," said another BNP leader, seeking anonymity.

used in the crime, the charge sheet said, adding that Md Nuruzzaman Nomani, along with Sibion Dio and Sanjay Chisim, helped the accused flee through the Haluaghat border.

Another accused, Md Aminul Islam, alias Raju, was allegedly involved in the planning and assisted in the killing, while Md Faisal allegedly kept the firearm and ammunition used in the murder.

Asked about Faisal Karim Masud's whereabouts and his video messages, Shafiqul Islam said the videos were reviewed, and preliminary findings suggest they are authentic, though the forensic report is pending.

He dismissed Faisal's claim of being in Dubai, saying evidence suggests he is holed up in India.

When asked about the DB's earlier claim that two people were arrested in India, which was later denied by Indian police, the DB chief said the statement was based on their investigation.

"What we said is true, but we do not want to comment on another country's position; we stated what our investigation revealed," he said.

On December 14, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber filed an attempted murder case with Paltan Model Police Station against Faisal and several unnamed individuals, which was later upgraded to a murder case after Hadi's death.

The case was subsequently transferred to the DB.

'Hadi killed out of political vengeance'

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establishes that Sharif Osman Hadi was shot dead out of political vengeance," he said, adding that confessional statements, CCTV footage, forensic tests, and digital evidence corroborated the findings.

Meanwhile, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber dismissed the charge sheet, alleging that the killing was not the act of a single individual but part of a larger conspiracy.

"The government claims a ward councillor instructed Faisal Karim Masud to shoot Hadi. Even a madman would not believe this. The murder was carried out by a wider network, with direct involvement of the state machinery. Until those forces are brought to justice, our struggle will not stop. Any charge sheet that excludes them is unacceptable to us."

Jaber made the remarks while speaking after the "March for Justice" programme in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh last night.

Earlier at the presser, the DB chief said supplementary charge sheets would be submitted if further evidence or involvement of additional individuals emerges.

Of the accused, 11 are currently in police custody. They include prime suspect Faisal's father Humayun Kabir, 70; mother Hasi Begum, 60; wife Saheda Parveen Samia, 24; brother-in-law Wahid Ahmed Shipu, 27; and friend Maria Akter Lima, 21. The

others are Md Kabir, 33; Nuruzzaman Nomani, alias Ujjal, 34; Sibion Dio, 32; Sanjay Chisim, 23; Aminul Islam, alias Raju, 37; and Md Faisal, 25.

The six absconding accused are prime suspect Faisal Karim Masud, 37; Alamgir Hossain, 26; Tajul Islam Chowdhury Bappi, 43; Philip Snal, 32; Mukti Mahmud, 51; and Jesmin Akter, 42.

According to the charge sheet, Faisal directly carried out the shooting, while Alamgir drove the motorcycle used in the attack. Bappi planned the killing and coordinated Faisal's escape across the border, with direct assistance from Philip.

Faisal's brother-in-law Mukti Mahmud and sister Jesmin Akter sheltered him and stored weapons. His father Humayun Kabir changed the number plate of the motorcycle used in the murder, maintained the weapon, and arranged its transfer to Narsingdi, while his mother Hasi Begum provided shelter and assisted in weapon maintenance, the charge sheet added.

Faisal's wife Saheda Parveen Samia, according to the charges, sent Tk 30,000 via bKash to facilitate his escape and hid the weapon in Narsingdi with help from her brother Wahid Ahmed Shipu, who transported the murder weapon from Dhaka.

Faisal's friend Maria Akter Lima had prior knowledge of the murder plan, while Md Kabir supplied the motorcycle

Systematic crime, not aberrations

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The report also found no legal justification for the disappearances. International law prohibits enforced disappearances under any circumstance, including during states of emergency.

Claims that rogue officers acted alone were similarly rejected.

Victims reported consistent methods of abduction, detention, and interrogation, often in facilities near senior officials' offices, making it implausible they were unaware. The operations required careful planning and coordination among the military, police, and intelligence agencies, said the report.

The commission also found clear evidence of inter-agency communication in transferring detainees between facilities.

These were organised, state-sponsored actions, not random acts of misconduct, it said.

Evidence indicates that enforced

disappearances targeted opposition members, activists, and government critics rather than individuals involved in terrorism, the Commission said. It added that many incidents occurred during elections or periods of political unrest, suggesting political suppression rather than national security concerns as the primary motive.

The report warned that these practices have increased social instability, leaving released victims with deep psychological and emotional scars, which have been exploited by extremist groups.

MILITARY LAWS VS CIVILIAN COURTS Some military officials have argued that allegations against military personnel should be addressed under military law rather than through civilian courts.

However, the Commission rejected this, highlighting the inadequacies of the Army Act, 1952, specifically for two reasons.

"First, the Army Act does not recognise enforced disappearance

or abduction as criminal offences, nor does it provide for superior or command responsibility. The omission is not merely technical: the Army Act is structurally incapable of addressing the gravity, systemic nature, and leadership accountability inherent in enforced disappearance," read the report.

"Second, the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 not only recognises enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity and expressly provides for the responsibility of superiors, it also contains a non-obstacle clause in Section 26, giving it overriding effect over any conflicting law."

The Commission also found that military-led investigations have failed to hold perpetrators accountable.

For example, an internal military inquiry into Brigadier Azmi's abduction was disbanded without resolution, and the evidence was destroyed, demonstrating the military's failure to ensure accountability.

NCP struggles to steady ship ahead of polls

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When contacted yesterday, Senior Joint Member Secretary Ariful Islam Adebek acknowledged the leadership crisis.

He said the party was moving to address the vacuum by forming a new election steering committee and was continuing work on its manifesto, which would be released after the seat-sharing process is finalised.

He added that the committee would be led by former adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, who recently joined the party as its spokesperson.

Minutes after the conversation with Ariful, the NCP issued a statement expanding Asif Mahmud's responsibilities.

Alongside overseeing the election process, he will now supervise multiple party cells, including media, publicity and publication, branding, office management, public relations, member recruitment, and research and policy.

He will also coordinate activities of the Dhaka North and Dhaka South units.

PARTY IN DISARRAY Internal disruption became visible during the final phase of alliance negotiations.

Tasnim Jara, senior joint member secretary and general secretary of the election steering committee, resigned from the party.

Khaled Saifullah, head of the research and policy wing and a central figure in manifesto preparation, also stepped down.

Multiple party sources said his

departure effectively halted the manifesto committee's work, as he had played a leading role in policy design and drafting.

The committee's remaining members – Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary and Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar – are now largely occupied with their own election campaigns, leaving manifesto work nearly dormant.

Sources further said that Khaled Saifullah left with key documents related to the manifesto, complicating efforts to restart the process.

Contacted for comment, Khaled Saifullah declined to respond.

Resignations have also hollowed out several operational units. Media Cell chief Mushfiq Us Salehin, ICT Cell chief Fahad Alam Bhuiyan, Office Cell head Saleh Uddin Silat, and Farmers Wing chief coordinator Azad Khan Bhashani have all quit.

The alliance decision has also taken a visible toll on the party's female leadership. Senior Joint Convener Samantha Sharmin, after withdrawing from electoral competition, has largely disengaged from party activities.

Another senior leader, Senior Joint Member Secretary Nahida Sarwar Niva, has not formally resigned but remains inactive in both election and organisational work, party sources said.

Others who have resigned or become inactive include Nusrat Tabassum, Monira Sharmin, southern region organiser Manjila Jhuma, northern region organiser Aranya Dyuti, and at

least five more leaders.

On December 29, two days after the 11-party alliance had been announced, NCP Convener Nahid Islam named Asif Mahmud as the party's spokesperson and head of the Election Management Committee, replacing Nasiruddin Patwary.

A senior party leader said the lost time had come at a heavy cost.

Had internal disagreements been resolved and the alliance decision taken two months earlier, he said, the party could have positioned itself competitively in 20 to 25 constituencies.

In volatile electoral environments, he added, the past two months had been decisive, and largely squandered.

Looking ahead, he said the party's collective effort was now focused on making optimal use of the remaining time, accelerating campaign preparations, filling leadership gaps pragmatically, and contesting the election with whatever organisational strength remains.

The NCP emerged in late February directly from the heart of the mass uprising, led by the youth who stood at its forefront. From its inception, the party pledged to reshape Bangladesh's political order, dismantle constitutional autocracy, and build a durable democratic framework.

It was formed by members of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee and Students Against Discrimination – two platforms born of the student movement that ultimately brought down the Awami League regime.

Legal loopholes allow defaulters

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enabled this. This is an ominous signal for the country."

Loan defaulters often go to the HC without repaying their bank loans and file writ petitions that drag on for years, said Mujeri, a former chief economist of the Bangladesh Bank.

He stressed that laws must be changed and the number of money loan courts increased.

"More judges, lawyers and courtrooms are required so that financial cases can be resolved quickly. When defaulters see that even writ petitions are disposed of

within two to three months, they will no longer be able to gain undue advantages by filing them."

Political governments have not implemented these reforms for various reasons.

"We expected the interim government would do it, but it did nothing," he added.

The amended RPO under the interim government allows the Election Commission to cancel an MP's seat even after the election if it is proven that the person is a loan defaulter or has provided false information.

"We can only state who is a loan

defaulter and who is not – the authority to decide the validity of an election rests solely with the EC," said BB Spokesman Aref Hossain Khan.

The bank can appeal against a candidate's writ petition, after which the EC will make its decision.

"But there is nothing more for us to do," said Khan, also an executive director of the BB.

For the 13th parliamentary election, 2,574 candidates submitted nominations across the country. Of them, 2,461 candidates were found to be default-free, according to BB officials.

Europe backs Greenland

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Venezuela has rekindled concerns that Greenland might face a similar scenario. Greenland has repeatedly said it does not want to be part of the United States.

"Greenland belongs to its people. It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland," said a joint statement issued by the leaders of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Denmark.

The leaders said security in the Arctic must be achieved collectively with Nato allies, including the United States.

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens Frederik Nielsen welcomed the European leaders' pledge of solidarity and renewed his call to the US for a "respectful dialogue".

Greenland, the world's largest island but with a population of just 57,000 people, is not an independent member of Nato but is covered by Denmark's membership of the Western alliance.

The island's strategic location between Europe and North America makes it a critical site for the US ballistic missile defence system. Its mineral wealth also aligns with Washington's ambition to reduce reliance on Chinese exports.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's security situation remained unclear yesterday after the US seized Nicolas Maduro and announced it would run the country.

Videos posted on social media



A man holds a picture of ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro during a rally in support of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in Caracas, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

showed armed men on the streets of Caracas. Tensions remained high in the capital, with shots reported overnight near the presidential palace.

Fifty-five Cuban and Venezuelan troops were killed during the US raid, according to tolls published yesterday.

Meanwhile, Maria Corina Machado, the Venezuelan opposition leader, repeatedly praised Trump on Monday

during a prime time appearance on Fox News, her first televised interview since the capture of Maduro.

She even offered him the Nobel Peace Prize she was awarded in October, a prize Trump has coveted for years. Machado also said she plans to return home "as soon as possible," and slammed the interim president Delcy Rodriguez in Caracas.