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Chinese envoy condemns attacks on *Star*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen has strongly condemned the recent attacks, vandalism and arson at the office of The Daily Star in Dhaka, expressing solidarity with the newspaper and support for independent media.

He made the remarks during a visit to The Daily Star building yesterday, which was vandalised, looted and set on fire in the early hours of December 19.

He described the attacks as unacceptable and emphasised that violence against media institutions undermines freedom of expression and the rule of law. Yao Wen said China firmly supports the role of independent media in a democratic society, and lauded The Daily Star's stance on democracy, freedom of speech and human rights.

He also stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists and media organisations so they can carry out their professional duties without fear or intimidation.



Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen walks amid charred rubbles at The Daily Star office, which was attacked and torched in the early hours of December 19. During his visit yesterday, the envoy strongly condemned the attack.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Seat-sharing talks between Jamaat, NCP nearing end

Shafiqur, Nahid hold meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday held a special meeting with Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, a day after announcing that seat-sharing within their alliance would be finalised soon.

According to NCP sources, the one-on-one discussion between the two leaders of the 11-party alliance focused on seat distribution and overall election strategy.

NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar told The Daily Star that during the meeting, the NCP and Jamaat chiefs also discussed ways to maximise the number of alliance candidates winning in the February 12 election.

The meeting took place at the Jamaat ameer's office in the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area.

In a post on his verified Facebook page after the meeting, Nahid said they discussed the upcoming national parliamentary election and the recent political situation, describing it as a "special meeting".

The meeting comes amid intense discussions to finalise seat-sharing among the 11 like-minded parties, including Jamaat, Islami Andolan Bangladesh and the NCP.



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Defence delaying Palak trial

Prosecutor tells ICT-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam yesterday told the International Crimes Tribunal-1 that the defence representing former state minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak appeared to be hoping the trial would not continue until after the election and was therefore attempting to delay proceedings.

Tribunal member Justice Shofiul Alam Mahmood immediately responded, "Will Awami League come to power if the election is held -- do not say like this."

Tajul replied that such remarks by the defence had reached the prosecution's attention.

The comment came after Palak's defence counsel requested more time to prepare for the charge-framing hearing, even though the date had earlier been fixed for Wednesday. The defence said jail authorities had not allowed them to bring laptops and pen drives when they visited Palak last Friday for privileged communication, and sought a tribunal order to permit this.

After hearing both sides, the tribunal set next Thursday for the defence hearing. Palak remains in custody after

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BNP struggles to rein in rebels


SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Despite repeated warnings from the BNP, most rebel candidates have remained in the electoral race, causing discomfort among party high-ups.

Only four of around 200 rebel candidates have withdrawn so far, party insiders said. However, the leadership expects more rebels to pull out in the coming days and pledge support to the nominated candidates.

The large number of rebel contenders has already triggered internal feuds and displeased the party's electoral partners. Political analysts said continued defiance of party decisions could weaken BNP candidates and open the door for opposition contenders to win in several constituencies where tough contests are anticipated.

According to the Election Commission, January 20 is the final date for withdrawal of candidature. Party leaders said with nine days remaining, they hope rebel



4 of around 200 BNP rebel candidates withdrew so far

Jan 20 set as final deadline for withdrawal of candidature

BNP already expelled 10 leaders for defying party directives

Rebel candidates active in at least 118 constituencies outside Dhaka

Party leadership warns of further expulsions if rebels do not step aside

candidates will accept the party decision and step aside.

The BNP has already expelled 10 party leaders for violating party

instructions by contesting the polls as rebel candidates.

An analysis of nomination papers submitted in 63 districts outside Dhaka shows that in 118 constituencies, around 179 BNP leaders filed nomination papers.

In the Dhaka-12 constituency, the BNP did not field any candidate, leaving the seat for Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque. Former convener of the Dhaka North City BNP unit, Saiful Alam Nirab, was expelled from the party for contesting the polls in defiance of party directives.

Nirab said he hopes a decision may come from the BNP within the next two to three days.

In Brahmanbaria-2, the BNP has also not announced its own candidate, as the seat has been allocated to a candidate of Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh.

BNP Assistant International Affairs Secretary Rumeen Farhana, who was expelled for contesting the seat, announced that she would

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Tarique to kick off campaign from Sylhet on Jan 22

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman will formally launch his party's election campaign for the 13th national parliamentary election from Sylhet on January 22.

"Tarique Rahman will go to Sylhet on January 22. However, the detailed tour plan is yet to be finalised," his Press Secretary Saleh Shibly told UNB.

Traditionally, Shibly said, the BNP begins its national election campaign from Sylhet by offering fateha at the shrines of Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) and Hazrat Shah Paran (R).

"During the visit, he will offer fateha at both shrines. It has not yet been decided where the campaign will formally begin, but I believe it will start in Sylhet after visiting the two shrines," he added.

On Saturday, while exchanging greetings with editors and senior journalists at a hotel in Dhaka, Tarique said his party will go to the people with its plans from January 22.

Party sources said Tarique Rahman, who assumed the post of party chairman on Friday night, will visit all divisions during the election campaign period -- from 6:00am on January 22 to 7:30am on February 10 -- to seek votes for the candidates of his party and alliance partners.



Participatory and peaceful polls key to democracy

Says EU chief election observer Ivars Ijabs

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union's Election Observation Mission (EOM) yesterday said a peaceful, participatory and transparent election in Bangladesh is crucial to strengthening democratic institutions.

"These historic elections will be crucial to bolster democratic institutions through the ballot box," said EU EOM Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs at a press conference at a city hotel.

The full mission will comprise around 200 observers from all 27 EU member states, as well as Canada, Norway and Switzerland. This is the EU's first fully fledged election observation mission in Bangladesh since 2008.

An 11-member core team began work in Bangladesh in late December, while a 56-member long-term observer team arrived yesterday and will be deployed across all 64 districts. In addition, 90 short-term observers will arrive shortly before the

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A pedestrian pauses to admire blooming flowers displayed on a footpath beside the Abahani playground in Dhaka's Dhanmondi, where passersby often stop to admire or buy plants for indoor and rooftop decoration. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

HC questions EC decision to accept NDF, JP nominations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule questioning the legality of the Election Commission's decision to accept the nomination papers of candidates from the National Democratic Front (NDF) and Jatiya Party (Ershad) for the February 12 national election.

In the rule, the court asked the EC, the government, NDF, and Jatiya Party to explain within two weeks why the EC's decision should not be declared illegal and why it should not be directed to cancel the nomination papers of the two parties' candidates.

The bench of Justice Razik-Al-Jalil and Justice Md Anwarul Islam issued the rule following a writ petition challenging the EC's decision to allow NDF and Jatiya Party to contest the election.

Abdullah Al Mahmud, a July warrior, filed the petition with the High Court on January 6, also seeking a directive for the EC to cancel the nomination papers submitted by NDF -- led by Anisul Islam Mahmud and Anwar Hossain Manju -- and Jatiya Party (Ershad), represented by its general secretary Shameem Haider Patwary.

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