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## Bias claims by rivals put EC in a bind

Parties making allegations to preempt commission leanings: expert

MOHUDDIN ALAMGIR

The political atmosphere heats up ahead of the start of formal electioneering, with major parties alleging that the Election Commission and the administration are selectively enforcing rules against their candidates.

Over the past week, leaders of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party have repeatedly voiced these concerns during meetings with the Election Commission, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and at public programmes.

Such allegations are often part of a political strategy to deter the commission from leaning towards any party, said an analyst and an election commissioner.

However, experts warned that the growing exchange of accusations may fuel voter anxiety at a critical juncture, as candidates are set to hit the campaign trail on Thursday.

They stressed that the EC must investigate complaints thoroughly and take a clear, objective stance to ensure a free, fair and widely acceptable election.

At a meeting with an NCP delegation yesterday, Chief Adviser Yunus said, "Any complaints or suggestions regarding the election should be immediately conveyed to the government. The government will take whatever measures are possible. Steps will be taken to ensure that no one can break the law."

To guarantee neutrality, changes in the field administration have been made through lottery. There is no scope for bias in this election.

"This is an election that will determine the nation's destiny. This is an election that can transform the country. This election must be free and fair."

Contacted by The Daily Star last night, two senior EC officials, requesting anonymity, acknowledged that the commission was indeed under pressure due to recent comments and demonstrations by political parties. It even had to revise the in-country postal voting ballots.

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**Growing exchange of accusations may fuel voter anxiety at a critical juncture, as candidates are set to hit the campaign trail on Thursday.**



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Plumes of smoke from factories along the southern bank of the Karnaphuli river swirl skyward, slowly staining the amber horizon with a haze of pollution. The photo was taken around dawn from the Shah Amanat Bridge area of the port city recently.

### MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

With the national election less than a month away, political parties are finalising their manifestos. The Daily Star spoke to economists to identify the pressing issues that should top the agenda for parties.

## Next govt must tackle poverty, wage freeze

AHSAN HABIB

Two years ago, Mahbubur Rahman, a resident of Savar, worked in a garment factory on the outskirts of Dhaka. Following a prolonged illness, he was forced to leave his job and now struggles to support his wife and two daughters on meagre wages by working as a nursery labourer.

Mahbubur, who completed secondary education, represents the fragile reality of the labour force. While he remains hopeful that the upcoming election will stabilise the industrial sector and allow him to return to factory work, his descent from formal employment to precarious survival illustrates a trend that leading economists recommend must take

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## Vote 'yes' to build a new Bangladesh

Yunus urges in address to nation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday called on citizens to vote "yes" in the upcoming referendum, saying the responsibility of building a new Bangladesh now lies in the hands of the people.



In a televised message, Yunus described the July uprising as an extraordinary achievement in the nation's history, creating an

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Newly appointed US Ambassador Brent T Christensen pays a courtesy call on BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman at the latter's political office in Gulshan yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

**'US very excited about upcoming election'**

New US ambassador tells Tarique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly appointed US Ambassador to Dhaka Brent Christensen has said that the United States looks forward to working with all Bangladeshi political parties to advance shared peace and prosperity.

He made the comment in a post on X after meeting BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday, his first meeting with a political leader since arriving on January 12.

"I met today with BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman to hear his perspective on upcoming elections," he said.

Ambassador Christensen arrived in Dhaka on January 12, two days after taking the oath of office in Washington, DC.

After an hour long meeting between the BNP chief and the US ambassador, BNP Joint Secretary General Humayun Kabir told reporters that a democratic transition was underway and would continue.

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**Rab member killed in Sitakunda attack**  
Three others of his team injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Rapid Action Battalion officer was beaten to death and three others injured after a group of criminals attacked a Rab team in the Jungle Salimpur area of Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Deputy Assistant Director Abdul Motaleb of Rab 7, police confirmed.

The incident occurred near the local BNP office in No. 1 Jungle Salimpur of the Chhinnamul area, according to police and Rab officials.

Rab 7 Media Officer ASP ARM Mozaffar Hossain said the team was attacked by local thugs while conducting an operation in the area.

"After being rescued, one succumbed to his injuries at a hospital, while the remaining three were admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH)," he added.

However, SI Nur Alam Ashek, in-charge of the CMCH police outpost, said no Rab members had been admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital until 8:30pm.

Rab sources later confirmed that the injured officers were taken to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Chattogram.

Chattogram district Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime and Operations) Sirajul Islam told The Daily Star, "We have learned that a Rab team went to the area to conduct an operation. A group of criminals suddenly attacked the team and abducted four members. Of them, one Rab member died at a hospital. We visited the spot and are investigating the incident."

Meanwhile, rumours that Rab officials had been gunned down

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