

Feb election a benchmark for future polls

Yunus tells US ambassador

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said the February 12 general elections would set a benchmark for all future polls in Bangladesh.

He made the remarks when the newly appointed US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Brent Christensen, paid his maiden courtesy call on the chief adviser at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka on Thursday, said the chief adviser's press wing yesterday morning.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed a wide range of issues, including the upcoming general elections, sweeping labour laws approved by the interim government, the planned Bangladesh-US tariff agreement and Rohingya crisis.

The chief adviser highlighted key foreign policy initiatives of the interim government including Dhaka's planned bid for ASEAN membership, and the need to revive Saarc as a key platform for regional and economic cooperation in South Asia.

Yunus said the government was fully prepared to hold free, fair, and transparent elections on February 12. He noted that the European Union would deploy a large number of election observers and expressed hope that other development partners would also send

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US Ambassador Brent Christensen at a meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka on Thursday.

PHOTO: CHIEF ADVISER'S PRESS WING

BARISHAL-5 Manisha banks on grassroots support

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Dr Manisha Chakraborty, candidate of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) from Barishal-5 constituency in the upcoming national parliamentary elections, has drawn considerable public attention with her campaign.

Of the 123 candidates contesting the 21 parliamentary seats in Barishal division, Manisha is one of the only two women candidates -- highlighting the persistent gender gap in electoral politics. The other is BNP candidate Israt Sultana Ilen Bhutto, who previously served as a member of parliament.

Manisha told this correspondent that she is focusing on direct engagement with voters through door-to-door campaigning, particularly among low-income communities.

"I have already visited all the slum areas and met people there. My main strength lies with low-income, working class people, young voters, and women," she said.

Manisha was recruited into the health cadre through the 34th BCS examination but chose not to join government service. Instead, she dedicated herself to BSD's politics, while providing free medical services to the poor and remaining actively involved in labour rights movements.

She hails from a family with a strong legacy in the Liberation War, with both her father and

grandfather being freedom fighters.

In 2018, during her campaign for the post of Barishal City Corporation mayor, Manisha first introduced the concept of "earthen banks" to collect small donations from supporters. This time, she has expanded the initiative alongside online fundraising.

"My campaign is funded through public donations. We



have distributed 100 earthen banks to well wishers, and many people themselves are collecting contributions to build the polls campaign fund to my support," she said.

"While elections are often equated with money, however, for us that is not the priority.

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Camps, crime, civic woes take centre stage in Dhaka-16

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK and SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

Kahkasan, a young woman from the Bihari Camp in Mirpur-11, lives under the constant fear of eviction. Growing up in the congested camp, she has faced a lack of water, gas, and other civic rights, alongside persistent health risks and an unstable environment.

Now a voter, the 23-year-old student's demands are simple yet profound -- basic civic amenities and permanent housing.

Furthermore, the newly enrolled young voter yearns for the security and education of the girls in the camp, as well as the guarantee of a dignified life.

Her story is echoed across Dhaka-16, from Rupnagar, Kalshi, and Pallabi, where longstanding problems remain unresolved.

Drug peddling and mugging are among residents' top concerns.

Due to poor drainage, even light rain floods roads, while local canals have effectively become open sewers.

Garment factories -- the economic backbone of the area -- are often targeted by extortionists and gangs, and slum fires continue to recur.

A M Salimullah, a resident



If we form the government, we will begin phased permanent rehabilitation for the people living in Urdu-speaking camps. Once people have stable homes, crime in these areas will naturally decline.

AMINUL HAQUE
BNP candidate



Past governments used these residents for criminal gains. We want to give them a normal life and a better environment and future for their children.

COL (RETD) ABDUL BATEN
Jamaat candidate

of Pallabi Housing Society, said the area's problems are frequently ignored due to its location on Dhaka's outskirts.

"Security is a major issue. Drug trading happens in broad daylight, and mugging and theft are rising. Yet, these

issues are rarely addressed," he told The Daily Star.

He hopes the upcoming election will bring stability. "We want a peaceful environment. An elected government might end this ongoing instability."

Dhaka-16, which includes wards 2, 3, 5 and 6 of Dhaka North City Corporation, is set for a closely contested race.

The BNP has nominated Aminul Haque, convener of Dhaka Metropolitan North BNP and former captain of the national football team.

His main rival is Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Col (ret'd) Abdul Baten, a former army officer.

Both candidates have launched formal campaigns.

Abdullah Al Mansur, office secretary of the National Citizen Party (NCP) -- part of the Jamaat-led 10-party alliance -- said Jamaat workers are focusing on door-to-door outreach in slum areas, while the BNP is maintaining a strong street presence through rallies and meetings.

Meanwhile, with over 50,000 voters residing in Urdu-speaking camps, the community is seen as a key "swing bloc" in the constituency.

However, Sadaqat Khan, president of the Urdu-speaking Peoples Youth Rehabilitation

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Democratic reform, an end to inequality

Promises Gonotantrik Juktafront in election manifesto

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonotantrik Juktafront yesterday unveiled its election manifesto ahead of the 13th national election scheduled for February 12, calling for a complete democratic restructuring of the state and an end to inequality, corruption, and authoritarian rule.

The manifesto was announced by BSD General Secretary Bazlur Rashid Firoz, also a central leader of the alliance, at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

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'Relations between Jamaat and US a warning sign'

Says Farhad Mazhar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poet and columnist Farhad Mazhar yesterday described the reported relationship between Jamaat-e-Islami and the United States as a "dangerous warning sign".

He made the remarks while responding to a question at a discussion titled "Nationwide gas, electricity and safe water crisis: what society should do", held at the Jatiya Press Club.

A journalist referred to a report published on Thursday by the US-based The Washington Post, which said the United States was seeking

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CHILD ABUSE

Sharmin Academy manager sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent Pabitra Kumar Barua, the manager and administrative officer of Sharmin Academy in Dhaka's Nayapaltan, to jail in a case filed over the assault on a four-year-old student.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Aminul Islam Junaid passed the order after police produced him before the court, seeking confinement in jail, said a sub-inspector working at the court.

While Pabitra was standing inside the dock at the courtroom, a journalist approached him about the reason behind the alleged abuse of the child.

In response, Pabitra said the incident occurred due to the circumstances at the time.

"The child was not beaten in the manner being

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PHOTO: STAR

SARASWATI PUJA

DU, JnU mandaps spotlight attacks on media houses

TANGILA TASNIM and RAKIB MADBBER

The Saraswati Puja celebration of Dhaka University's Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, held at Jagannath Hall yesterday, featured the themes of mob violence and arson attacks on Bangladeshi media houses.

The puja began yesterday morning through invoking the goddess followed by the offering of anjali, a floral tribute.

To highlight the violence and arson attacks on the media houses in December last year, the altar's backdrop was designed to symbolically represent the burnt building of The Daily Star.

Anuska Chakrabarty, one of the organisers and a student of the department, said, "Today we worship our goddess for a prosperous academic life, creativity, wisdom and inspiration. We always aim to reflect and protest through the themes. Each year, we choose a theme that resonates with the

events happening in our society."

"As students of the journalism department, it is our duty to protest against mob violence, a severe violation of freedom of expression. Journalism serves the public and spells out the truth. When journalists and media houses face brutal attacks, it is a serious



concern for both our society and its future," she added.

According to a press release, 76 puja mandaps were set up under the supervision of the Jagannath Hall administration.

Jagannath Hall general secretary Shudipto Pramanic said, "Seventy-four departments have set up their own mandaps, and there are two

goddess idols provided by our hall authority. As in every year, we are hosting the largest puja at this venue."

Meanwhile, the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Jagannath University, in its Saraswati Puja celebration yesterday, also highlighted recent mob violence and arson attacks against Bangladeshi media organisations, with images depicting the fire-damaged buildings of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo placed behind the altar.

The puja was held beneath the Shajid Building on JnU campus, beginning at 8:30am with the offering of anjali.

Upoma Mandol, a student of the department and one of the organisers, said, "Alongside worshipping the goddess of knowledge, wisdom, creativity and inspiration, we have used this year's puja theme to protest the brutal attacks on the media. Without a free media, democracy cannot be

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