

BNP moves to unite grassroots A party yet to find its voice

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He said a strong grassroots network is essential for connecting with supporters, implementing policies at the local level, and maintaining unity within the party.

Party sources said the top leadership is likely to raise the organisational challenges at its policy-making forum in April.

Following the talks, decisions will be made on revamping the party structure, which is set to begin after Eid-ul-Fitr.

Before the national polls, nearly five dozen district and upazila-level top leaders, including district presidents, secretaries, organising secretaries, conveners, and member secretaries, were expelled for violating party directives.

Key leadership positions in 29 districts are now vacant, severely impacting the party's organisational activities.

As a result, the implementation of central directives has slowed, coordination between district and grassroots units has weakened, and the observance of national days and routine party programmes has also been affected, said party sources.

Grassroots leaders who were expelled or sidelined are privately communicating with top leaders, expressing their desire to regain their positions. They have indicated their willingness to abide by future party directives if given another chance.

Meanwhile, BNP expelled over five dozen rebel candidates and more than 200 grassroots leaders for their involvement in factional struggles.

Sources said many district committees lack full membership and are being led by controversial figures, further deepening divisions within the party.

Moreover, some grassroots leaders have been accused of failing to provide the necessary support to party lawmakers, making it more difficult for the elected representatives to carry out their work effectively.

The party has yet to discuss the return of the expelled leaders.

"We know that many top-ranking district leaders were expelled, but there is little chance of bringing them back to their posts. After the Standing Committee meeting, we will make the final decision," said another Standing Committee member.

The party also puts emphasis on assessing its strongholds across the country, looking at where it has the most support and identifying areas that require attention.

Party leaders stressed that the organisational challenges within the party need to be addressed immediately to ensure that the BNP can regain its strength and maintain unity at all levels.

"If any organisational weaknesses are identified, we will take immediate action to solve the issues to strengthen the party's

all units," said a senior BNP leader, wishing to be unnamed.

The decision to reorganise the party comes after an evaluation of its performance in the February 12 election.

Sources have indicated that BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman will make the final decision regarding the expelled leaders.

As the BNP moves forward, the party is making it clear that the MPs and ministers in the newly formed government will be expected to focus primarily on their duties.

Other leaders within the party who are not involved in government roles will be given more importance when it comes to strengthening the party at the grassroots level, said party leaders.

Besides internal divisions, the BNP is grappling with incidents involving criminal activities by some of its leaders, which have damaged the party's image and posed further challenges for its leadership.

Party sources said the BNP is taking firm action against those involved in such activities, while additional measures will be implemented to tackle the root causes and safeguard the party's integrity.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a rights organisation, internal conflicts within the BNP from December last year to January this year resulted in four killings, 25 incidents of infighting, and 272 party leaders being injured.

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and questions over whether its early momentum can translate into lasting influence.

Talking to The Daily Star, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, party spokesperson, said, "It was challenging to establish ourselves as a political party since the July uprising and to secure our position by participating in the national election. We overcame that and secured six seats in parliament. Now our main goal is to strengthen the organisational and political structure."

Senior Joint Member Secretary Ariful Islam Adeb said the party plans to expand activities nationwide by forming official committees, professional forums, and political councils at district, upazila, and thana levels.

Party sources said the NCP currently operates 10 front organisations, including those for students, youth workers, doctors, lawyers, and professional

associations.

Several attempts were made to contact party Convener Nahid Islam for comment on the party's future activities and the alliance's position, but he could not be reached.

Amid plans for organisational expansion, the NCP faces a leadership crisis. At least 60 leaders and activists have resigned in three phases over the past year.

Ahead of the national election, around 20 leaders, including former senior joint member secretary Tasneem Zara, left after the party joined an 11-party alliance led by Jamaat in December.

While senior female leaders, including Samanta Shermeen and Nahida Sarwar Niva, have not resigned from the party, they remain inactive in its activities.

"I will always have good wishes for the party. I'm staying away from the activities due to various differences within the party, but I will always be by the side

of the party in any crisis," Samanta told The Daily Star.

Party Member Secretary Akhter Hossen said discussions are ongoing to bring back those who resigned.

Political analyst Mohiuddin Ahmed noted that repeated departures of key leaders have weakened the party's organisational strength and continuity.

"The NCP has not yet been able to develop an independent political identity. Although six seats in parliament are possible with the alliance's votes, not as an independent force."

Writer and researcher Altaf Parvez added that the party's potential has diminished due to "political inexperience and moral inconsistency."

He said the decision to shift from a movement to a party and accept ministerial positions damaged its momentum. "Now the party needs to make an objective assessment of itself, identify its mistakes, and plan for the future," he said.

Saudi invites PM

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Elkhereji also sought Bangladesh's support for major reforms to enhance the performance of the OIC Secretariat.

On the sidelines of the OIC meeting on Palestine, Khalilur held separate bilateral talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar of Pakistan, Deputy Foreign Minister Musa Kulalikaya of Turkey, Foreign Minister Dr Varsen Ohanes Vartan Aghabekian of Palestine, and Foreign Minister Sering Modou Njie of the Gambia.

The leaders congratulated Tarique on the BNP's electoral victory, expressing confidence that Bangladesh would achieve political stability and accelerate development under his leadership.

They also commended Bangladesh for its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and expressed full backing for Bangladesh's candidature for the presidency of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly.

In a separate meeting, Dar recalled his meeting last year with the late prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, and said that Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif looked forward to visiting Bangladesh to greet Tarique, hoping for improved bilateral ties under the new government.

Highlighting the longstanding ties between Turkey and Bangladesh,

Turkey deputy FM expressed hope for the steady expansion of cooperation in multiple sectors under the new government in Dhaka.

Khalilur thanked Turkey for its continued support for Rohingya refugees, and both

sides agreed to work for an early resolution of the crisis. He also handed over an invitation to Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to visit Bangladesh after Ramadan.

During talks with Aghabekian, the foreign minister reiterated Bangladesh's steadfast support for the Palestinian people and stressed that a just solution lies in establishing an independent, sovereign Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestinian minister praised Bangladesh's consistent support.

Khalilur said that although Palestine had withdrawn its candidature for the UNGA presidency, its cause would be upheld if he is elected to the post. The Palestinian side assured support from Arab and Islamic countries for Bangladesh's candidature.

In his meeting with Njie, Khalilur thanked Gambia for its continued support for the Rohingya, including the case filed against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice over alleged genocide.

Both sides agreed to hold an event on the Rohingya issue during the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Baghdad in April. Njie also pledged support for Bangladesh's UNGA presidency bid and offered to mobilise backing from African countries.

Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Humayun Kabir, Foreign Secretary Ambassador Mollah Farhad Hossain and Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the OIC MJH Jabed were present at the meetings.

Little ones bring joy to book fair

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while also delivering meaningful messages. We try to address social superstitions through this medium," he said.

Despite the lively Children's Hour, the general crowd was thin in the afternoon. Although it was Friday, most stalls saw low turnout.

At several stalls, instead of books, the sounds of hammers and saws could still be heard, as construction work remained unfinished and some publishers had yet to arrange their displays.

Sirajul Kabir Chowdhury, director of Anyaprakash, said the environment was poor, with piles of garbage, soil and bricks in front of many stalls. He said there seemed to be confusion over waste disposal.

Visitor Sushmita Roy said, "I usually visit the book fair several times every year. This is my first visit this time, and it feels like the fair started without proper preparation. Most stalls are not ready, and there is excessive dust. It should have been better organised before opening."

Another visitor, Adilur

Rahman, said the fair appeared disorganised this year and that it was harder to navigate compared to previous years.

A total of 16 new books arrived at the fair yesterday. The morning featured children's drawing and recitation competitions.

In the afternoon, a discussion titled "In Remembrance: Farida Parveen" was held.

The paper was presented by Mohammad Romel, with participation from Dr Abu Ishak Hossain. Poet and thinker Farhad Mazhar presided over the session.

5 held over Narsingdi girl rape

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According to the DIG, two of them are directly accused in the rape, while the other three allegedly acted as local arbitrators in an effort to hush up the incident through a so-called social arbitration.

The prime accused, Nurul, remains at large, and drives are underway to arrest the remaining suspects.

Local MP Khayrul Kabir Khokon, who accompanied the DIG during the visit, told reporters that political identity would not shield anyone. "Criminals must face the law. There will be zero tolerance," he said, urging lawyers not to assist those accused in what he termed a "heinous and inhuman" crime.

An autopsy was conducted at Narsingdi Sadar Hospital yesterday, said Resident Medical Officer Dr Farida Gulshanara Kabir.

"The victim was strangled to death with an orna (scarf) wrapped around her neck. There are also signs indicating that she was raped before the murder," she told The Daily Star.

The five arrestees were sent to jail by a court yesterday, said Md Kamal

Hossain, officer-in-charge of Madhabdi Police Station. Police have sought a 10-day remand for each of them; the hearing is scheduled for Sunday.

The body was handed over to the family and buried later in the afternoon. The family has been placed under police protection over security concerns, the OC added.

Police recovered the body of the 15-year-old, Amena Akter, from a cropland in Madhabdi on Thursday morning.

Her parents alleged that she was abducted in front of her father on Wednesday night and later killed by a group of stalkers who had gang raped her around two weeks earlier.

Rights groups and student organisations have condemned the killing and demanded exemplary punishment.

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) expressed deep anger and concern in a statement yesterday, calling for justice and accountability. The incident once again shows that women and children remain gravely unsafe, it said.

Citing data from Ain o

Salish Kendra, MJF noted that 35 children were subjected to various forms of violence and abuse and 25 were killed last month, nearly one child falling victim each day.

It urged the newly elected government to fulfil its pledge to ensure justice and protect women and children, and to guarantee immediate security for the victim's family.

In a separate statement, Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) termed the incident a "grave breach" of human rights. Referring to its own data, the organisation said 2,047 women and girls faced violence in 2023, including 828 rape victims, of whom 474 were children. It demanded a prompt, transparent investigation and trial under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

Meanwhile, Dhaka University Central Students' Union and Jagannath University Central Students' Union staged separate protests on their campuses yesterday, calling for exemplary punishment for those responsible.

Cancel bails of Ivy

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on bail have been accused of looting and organised extortion in different areas and demanded their arrest and trial.

He further alleged that AL leaders and activists are being released on bail in large numbers across different districts.

He demanded immediate justice over the killings, warning that those released on bail could again become involved in violence, for which the government would bear responsibility.

Porwar also claimed that some individuals released

on bail have been accused of looting and organised extortion in different areas and demanded their arrest and trial.

Porwar demanded that the bail of Bodi, Ivy, and other AL leaders be cancelled and that they be brought to trial quickly.

He also urged an investigation into the reopening of AL offices and necessary measures to stop such activities, warning that otherwise a mass resistance involving students and the public would be built.

32 out of 36 brick

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the directives while continuing operations.

Several kilns, including M/S MRS Bricks in Sadar upazila and M/S PN Co Bricks in Durgapur upazila, appealed to the Environment Court, but their appeals were dismissed. Apart from this, the court's directives have not been fully enforced.

Recent visits found at least four kilns operating along the Netrakona-Mohanganj railway line. In Thakurakona under Sadar upazila, MRS Bricks operates beside a road and railway line.

In Patli village of Barhatta upazila, RMB Bricks is located close to a railway line and a primary school. In Kalmakanda upazila, PCB Bricks operates on cropland along the Gumai riverbank.

Contacted, Md Abdullah Al Amatin, assistant director of DoE in Netrakona, said that 32 of the 36 brick kilns in the district have been operating without proper

authorisation in one way or another.

He added that several kilns have been fined during drives conducted for violations such as using topsoil and firewood. "More enforcement operations will be carried out in the coming days, and legal action will be taken in accordance with the law."

Netrakona Deputy Commissioner Md Saifur Rahman said that action against illegal brick kilns is primarily taken through the DoE.

"Due to election-related engagements, operations had been temporarily halted. However, regular drives will now resume. Executive magistrates have already conducted operations against several illegal kilns, imposing fines and demolishing some structures," he said.

The DC warned that no one continuing illegal operations in defiance of court orders would be spared.

Dhaka condemns

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land rights of the Palestinians.

He also demanded a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and an unconditional and unhindered access of the international aid workers and humanitarian support providers to the affected men, women and children in the Strip.

Khalilur conveyed the Ramadan greetings from Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to the Muslim Ummah and stated that the newly elected democratic government in Bangladesh looks forward to closely working with the OIC Member States.

On the sidelines of the OIC meeting, the foreign minister held bilateral talks with Pakistan Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar; the Gambian Foreign

Minister Sering Modou Njie, Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Varsen Ohanes Vartan Aghabekian, Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Musa Kulalikaya, and Saudi Arabia Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed A Elkhereji.

The foreign minister shared with the leaders the visions and work programmes of the government particularly with regard to foreign policy, foreign trade and investment, resolution of the Rohingya issue and improving the effectiveness of the OIC Secretariat.

They also expressed strong support to Bangladesh's candidature for the presidency of the 81st UN General Assembly. He invited the dignitaries to pay a visit to Bangladesh at their convenience.

3 DB men attacked

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their way back, accompanying Lablu.

The injured are SI Anwar Hossain, constables Mirza Rezaul Karim and Hasan Ali.

The two constables are currently undergoing treatment at hospital, while the sub-inspector received first aid. At that time, the attackers snatched Lablu, added the OC.

SI Anwar filed two cases with Singair Police Station yesterday – one under the Narcotics Control Act, naming Lablu as an accused, and another against 19 named individuals along with 15 to 20 unidentified individuals.

Those who have been arrested are Purnima Begum, 20; Shabana, 26;

Jahanara, 23; Azimuddin, 65; Aminur, 27; Antar, 20; Mou Akhtar, 19; Asma Begum, 45; and Abdur Rouf alias Jewel, 26.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the arrested individuals were involved in the attack. Efforts are underway to arrest the remaining accused, the OC said.

The investigation officer of the case, Md Rezaul Karim, said all the arrestees have directly participated in the attack.

However, relatives of the arrested individuals said the real attackers have fled, and those who have been arrested are innocent.

Further legal action will be taken based on the investigation, added the OC.

A relief for consumers

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prices had spiked at the beginning of Ramadan but eased in the second week.

Retailers said onions that were selling at Tk 60-70 per kg are now priced at Tk 35-40, while potato prices have declined from Tk 20-25 to Tk 15-20 per kg.

Fruit prices show a similar trend. Sagar bananas are now selling for Tk 150-160 per dozen, down from Tk 180-200. Apples and malta prices have dropped by about Tk 50 per kg from earlier rates of Tk 350-380. Thai papaya, which was selling for up to Tk 200 per kg, is now priced between Tk 120 and Tk 160, while local varieties have declined to Tk 80-100 from Tk 100-120.

In the protein segment, beef prices have eased slightly, now Tk 750-800 per kg compared to Tk 770-800 earlier. Mutton remains unchanged at Tk 1,300 per kg. Eggs are now selling at Tk 100-120 per dozen, while broiler chicken prices have dropped from Tk 190-200 per kg to Tk 180-190. Sonali chicken remains steady at Tk 300 per kg.

Rice prices have also remained stable, with wholesalers attributing the trend to a slight dip in demand during the fasting month.

"Vegetable supplies are increasing, but the number of customers is low, leading to a fall in prices," said Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujon, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Brihattar Paikari Kacha Bazar Arot Byabasayi Malik Samity.

Quakes outside

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jumped up, called my wife, and ran outside," he said.

The man in his mid-60s said he had never experienced anything like it. "We've felt tremors before, but never a jolt like this in my life. It was terrifying. Many of my neighbours were screaming in panic."

What alarmed him most, he added, was learning that the epicentre was in his own district, near his upazila.

Earlier, three earthquakes that rattled Narsingdi within 32 hours in November last year caused panic among Dhaka residents and became a widely discussed issue nationwide.

Of the nine earthquakes recorded this month, four occurred in Satkhira and Sylhet – two in each district – while the rest were reported in Gazipur, Sunamganj, Mymensingh, Chapainawabganj and Jhenaidah.

The unusual frequency of seismic activity within such a short span has sparked fresh anxiety among people.

All the quakes ranged from 3.0 to 5.4 on the Richter scale and were categorised by the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) as minor to moderate.

According to the BMD, over the past 14 months, 38 tremors occurred within Bangladesh or along its borders in 15 districts, including Dhaka, Narsingdi, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Satkhira, Jhenaidah, Jashore, Rangpur, Kurigram, Bandarban, and Thakurgaon.

These measured between 2.9 and 5.7 on the Richter scale.

Prof Syed Humayun Akhter, former chairman of the Department of Geology at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star that the epicentre was at a shallow depth of less than 10km, which caused the strong shaking.

Akhter said he does not expect an earthquake stronger than a moderate one in Satkhira, as the

district does not fall within a seismically active zone.

"Still, people need to be careful while constructing houses," he said, pointing to cracks formed in many homes by yesterday's tremor.

Bodruddoza Mia, chairman of Dhaka University's geology department, said Bangladesh is in a tectonically active zone.

"Earthquakes of magnitude four to five are expected and will continue to occur," he said.

He said the country lacks updated data on active fault lines within its borders. While the Dauki and Madhupur faults are well known, many others remain unmapped.

He said the government should conduct a fresh seismic survey, as the last one was carried out several decades ago.

"With modern technology, we will be able to update our seismological map to pinpoint earthquake risks more precisely," he said.

Bazlar Rashid, deputy director of the Geological Survey of Bangladesh, said the last seismic mapping was conducted in 1979.

He said the country's internal fault lines are unlikely to trigger a "mega-earthquake", as geological mapping has yet to identify any "mega-thrust" fault line within Bangladesh.

However, experts have previously warned that 7.0-magnitude earthquakes occur in this region roughly every 150 years, and magnitude-8 events every 250-300 years.

The last major earthquake in this region was an 8.1 in 1897, which originated in Assam. In 1918, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck the Srimangal area, causing extensive damage.

According to the experts, Bangladesh sits at the junction of the Indian, Myanmar and Eurasian tectonic plates.

The Dauki Fault in Sylhet, the Chattogram-Arakan Fault along the Chattogram-Teknaf belt, and the Sagaing Fault in Myanmar together place the country at extremely high seismic risk.