

**| TIMELINE |**

**DAY 1 July 29: A race, a comparison, and a smile**

It all started with a mad race. Two buses from Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan were racing towards a stop near the Armed Forces Medical College in Kurmitola. It was peak hour. The students were in a rush to get home and both buses wanted to cash in on that. They were racing on the Mirpur to Airport flyover.

The first bus to get off reached the spot and stopped right in front of a dozen school-going students. Just as the students started getting on the bus, however, the



said with a smile. Videos of Shajahan's statement spread rapidly across social media, creating an uproar and in many ways sowing the seeds of the protest.

In the meantime, several hundred students had rushed to the spot where the accident took place, and blocked the road. The roads were blocked for two hours, before police managed to bring the situation under control by 2:15pm.

In this time, few buses were vandalised and traffic on the Airport road was brought to a halt.



second bus attempted to squeeze through the left side of the first bus, killing 18-year-old Abdul Karim and 17-year-old Dia Khanam Mim on the spot and injuring nine other students.

That same day, Shipping Minister and Transport leader Shajahan Khan played down the incident by comparing it to a road crash in India. "33 people were killed in Maharashtra recently. But do they talk about it like the way we do?" he

# THE RISE AND SILENCING OF A MASS STUDENT MOVEMENT

How did the protests begin? What made it expand in such a short time? And finally, why did it die out? The following is a day-to-day breakdown of the protests created solely based on reports published in *The Daily Star* from July 29 to August 7.

**DAY 4 August 1: Bigwigs without licenses**



This was the day when the beauty of the protests began to slowly unfold taking the entire nation in its grip. Like the previous days, the major intersections were blocked. This time though, students, instead of performing mere sit-ins on the streets, were busy checking random vehicles for licences. The results were extraordinary. In several videos making the rounds on social media, protestors were seen stopping police officers on bikes who didn't have licences. The power of the protest was evident in the fact that the police officers were compelled to stop and listen to the students. In one such instance, a police officer tried in vain to get away from the students by stating that the police don't need licences. In another case, a traffic sergeant was forced to fine a police officer for not carrying a licence. Each of these videos went viral. There were of course many police officers who did carry licences. These instances were eye-openers and caught the attention of the entire nation.

The highlight of the day though was when Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed's BMW got stuck amidst the protests while attempting to drive on the wrong side at Bangla Motor. Caught in the act, Tofail, however, said that he had gone there to meet and greet the students. While the enthusiastic youngsters appreciated the concern shown by the minister, they asked him to drive on the right side of the road. The incident was filmed and it spread like wildfire on social media platforms. Encouraged, many more students got on to the streets in the following days and began supporting the traffic sergeants by checking licences and other vehicle-related documents.

The day also witnessed the students announce some of their key demands including checking of unfit vehicles, not allowing buses to carry more passengers than the capacity, and placing speed-breakers in accident-prone areas. As the protest gained more popularity, the Education Ministry in a sudden move announced that all the educational institutions would remain closed for the sake of 'students' safety.'

**DAY 2 July 30: A call for resignation**

The protest started again the next day. Students, wearing uniforms and carrying their school bags, from several educational institutions blocked Airport road and brought the traffic system to its knees.

On that very day, students also gathered at Science Laboratory, Mirpur 10 and Pragati Sarani, expressing solidarity with the protests. They demanded the resignation of Shajahan Khan. Posters demanding justice for their two deceased peers flooded the roads.

"We need 33 dead bodies for justice" read one placard referring to Shajahan's statement.

In reply to the students' demands, Shajahan said that he had solved many serious problems of the transport sector and that those should be taken into account. When asked if he would apologise, he said: "I am not supposed to apologise. Those who are responsible for the accident will apologise. However, as I am involved with workers' politics, I am expressing my deep shock."

Meanwhile, the drivers and the assistants of the Jabal-e-Noor buses involved in the accident were arrested and their registration numbers suspended by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

On this day, the protests went on for almost six hours and caused major traffic delays.



**DAY 3 July 31: A face-off and injured students**

The intensity of the protests increased many folds as thousands of students from various schools blocked almost every crucial intersection of the capital.

There were face-offs with law enforcers for the first time and at least 20 students were injured. Buses were torched as well. Under pressure, Shajahan Khan apologised for his earlier remarks. In addition, the Prime Minister's Office directed the police to take legal action against underage drivers, drivers without licences, and those responsible for the accident on July 29.

Students mostly stopped all kinds of big vehicles during their protests. Meanwhile, at Shanir Akhra, a pick-up van ran over a 12th grader. The student had to receive treatment at a local hospital for his hip joint and left leg.

This incident further fuelled the anger.



**DAY 5 August 2: Steps to dismantle the protest begin**

Aside from shutting down educational institutions, the government started taking several other steps to calm the agitating students. For one, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina personally met the families of Abdul Karim and Dia Khanam Mim, the students who passed away in the accident on July 29. After the meeting, the Prime Minister's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim quoted Mim's father as saying: "We want students to go back home as measures will be taken to prevent such accidents in the future." In addition to that, three ministers blamed the BNP for being involved in this protest. "They [BNP] have no options left. So, they will now depend on the quota reform movement and student movement. They don't have the strength, courage, and ability to do something on their own," Obaidul Quader told reporters. That a third party was reportedly involved in the protests was an aspect that members of the ruling party would go on to mention repeatedly in the coming days.

But the youth power would not be dimmed, they poured out onto the roads in a show of defiance and determination and just as in the last few days, they kept

checking for drivers' documents. They stopped the SUV of Water Resources Minister Anwar Hossain Manju's car as well as the SUV of a police DIG for not having a license. The protestors were joined by many guardians and cultural activists pledging solidarity to the cause.

The students also successfully managed to carve out an emergency lane on some of the roads in a bid to help ambulances and other passengers with emergencies pass by.

The protests spread out of Dhaka with students in Chittagong, Khulna, and Sylhet expressing solidarity with the protests for the first time.

However, the protests soon took an ugly turn. In Mirpur, as students were stopping vehicles to check licence and registration in the afternoon, some policemen came blowing whistles and asked them to clear the road in front of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority office. A group of young men, many of whom had their faces covered or wore helmets, showed up at the scene too and attacked the students with wooden logs and sticks in front of SOS Hermann Gmeiner College.

Together with police, the men in helmets chased the



students away from the road. The protestors retaliated with brickbats and at one point there was a scuffle between several protestors and police.

The students gathered again in Mirpur-14 area around 4:00pm and continued their demonstration. Law enforcers with batons charged at the crowd to disperse them later. The streets in Mirpur 13 and 14 were cleared around 6:45pm.

Some Facebook live posts, which went viral during the attack, showed police officials beating up students trapped on the staircase of a footbridge.

**DAY 6 August 3: Intensified attacks, a bus strike and a warning**

Transport owners and workers suspended bus services, in what seemed to be yet another move to counter the student movement. They announced an undeclared strike causing even more suffering to people. The police warned that they would not sit idle if anyone tried to torch a vehicle or cause violence. The attacks on the protestors intensified.

A group of 30-35 anti-movement men beat up some students of University of Liberal Arts in front of its campus-B on Dhanmondi-7/A around 6:00pm.

As a reporter of priyo.com, Pradip Das, was taking photographs of the incident with his mobile phone, the attackers swooped on the journalist and broke his phone. The portal's head of news, Rafiqul Ranju, came to his rescue, but the attackers chased him.

However, students continued assuming the role of traffic police as they did in the previous five days, controlling traffic. At some places, they were checking driving licences and fitness certificates. The movement was quickly gaining support outside of the capital.

