

Former Lok Sabha speaker Somnath dies

TOI, NEW DELHI

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee died yesterday morning at the age of 89.

The veteran parliamentarian suffered a massive heart attack and breathed his last at 8:10 am.

He was admitted to Belle Vue Clinic in Kolkata last Tuesday after suffering a cardiac arrest. He was suffering from kidney-related ailments.

A 12-member team of doctors was keeping a constant watch on the veteran politician.

Last month, the former speaker had suffered a hemorrhagic stroke. He underwent a treatment for 40 days and was thereafter discharged.

However, his condition deteriorated last Tuesday and he had to be hospitalised again, an official said.

A ten-time Lok Sabha MP, Chatterjee was a central committee member of the CPM, which he had joined in 1968.

He won the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award in 1996. He

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Holding placards, students of Collectorate School and College demonstrate on the institution's premises in Rangpur yesterday, demanding justice for Tanvir Ahmed Zion. Tenth-grader Zion was run over and killed by a speeding bus while he was on his way to the school on Sunday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Pakistan's new parliament convenes

328 members take oath

DAWN ONLINE

The first session of the 15th National Assembly ended yesterday after 328 members of the lower house of the parliament took oath following their election in the July 25 countrywide polls. Earlier, it was reported that 329 lawmakers would take oath but MNA Sahabzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan from Jhang was unable to attend the session.

Outgoing NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq administered the oath to the MNAs-elect in the 342-member house, in what is a part of only the second democratic transition in the country's history.

Prime minister-in-waiting and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan and other prominent political leaders, including PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and former president Asif Ali Zardari, were present in the assembly for the oath-taking.

TV footage showed the PTI chief shaking hands and posing for a photo with Bilawal, who is entering NA for his maiden term.

The session commenced with the

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Scrap almost all quotas

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When his attention was drawn to it, the cabinet secretary said even an observation by the court becomes legally binding for the executive branch. He said they analysed the verdict but could not fully understand and thus would seek opinions.

About the consequence of abolishing the quotas, the cabinet secretary yesterday said those receiving the quota facility for being backward have already advanced to a certain stage.

On Monday, students and jobseekers pressing for quota reforms threatened tougher agitation if the government did not meet by August 31 their three-point demand: a gazette notification on the reforms, unconditional release of their detained leaders and exemplary punishment to those who had attacked them during demonstrations.

Of the 56 percent spots reserved in the civil service, 30 percent are for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people of underdeveloped districts, five percent for members of indigenous communities and one percent for the physically challenged.

Amid a quota reform movement, the government formed the committee and asked it to submit a report within 15 working days.

The committee, which includes secretaries to the public administration ministry, finance ministry, Liberation War affairs ministry, law ministry (legislative division), Public Service Commission, and the acting secretary to the Prime Minister's

Office, later got 90 days more time to do its job.

Talking to The Daily Star, Hasan Al Mamun, convener of Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, a platform that spearheaded the quota reform movement, said the government going to court is nothing but a delaying tactic.

"The government told us that the quota system would be abolished totally, but we do not see it yet. We want the government to reduce the quota to 10-15 percent from the existing 56 percent," said Mamun.

"Besides, the privilege the grandchildren of freedom fighters are enjoying under the quota system is not logical and there is no such directive in the court's verdict."

He added they would continue their agitation until the logical reforms were made.

In February, students of different public universities and jobseekers, under the banner of Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, started the movement.

Amid countrywide agitation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 11 announced all quotas in civil service would be abolished.

But as no gazette notification was issued, the protesters began boycotting classes and examinations in all universities and colleges from May 14.

The quota reform movement lost momentum following the attacks on demonstrators allegedly by Chhatra League activists and arrests of some of its leaders.

Towards legal recognition

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government move, arguing that it would create confusions as Qawmi and general educations are two completely different modes of education.

"The quality of their [Qawmi] education doesn't match with that of mainstream education. People will raise questions about the standard of the degrees in both formats. The degree in mainstream education has been undermined through this move," said Professor Emeritus of Dhaka University Serajul Islam Choudhury.

Noted academician Syed Manzoorul Islam, a former teacher of the university, said it appears to be a political decision rather than an academic one, as this comes ahead of the national elections.

However, Islamic thinker Maulana Farid Uddin Masoud thanked the prime minister for the cabinet approval, saying the matter would not have progressed this far without her interest.

"Through the honour and dignity that have now been given, the students of Qawmi madrasas will be able to get jobs," he said.

The country's madrasa system is divided into two categories -- Alia and Qawmi.

Alia madrasas, registered with and supervised by Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, offer a distinctive combination of modern and religious education.

Qawmi madrasas, on the other hand, have so far been an uncharted territory with no government monitoring, supervision or support. They are run mostly with private donations.

There are about 14,000 Qawmi madrasas across the country, according to last year's report of Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics.

These madrasas operate under six boards with a common name -- Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasa Education Boards or Befaul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh. They are said to follow the syllabus of Darul Uloom Deoband, a historic Islamic school of India, focusing mostly on Arabic, Fikah (Islamic law), Tafsir (explanation of Quran), Hadith, and Persian and Urdu languages.

The Qawmi madrasas have six levels of education, starting from Ibtidaiyah (primary) to Dawra-e-Hadith.

THE PROPOSED LAW

The cabinet secretary said the proposed law was designed on the basis of a gazette notification the education ministry published on April 13 last year, recognising the Dawra-e-Hadith degree as equivalent to master's degree, reports UNB.

The bill, titled "Making Dawra-e-Hadith (Takmil) Certificate in Qawmi Madrasa Equivalent to

Maulana Nazmul Hasan

Jamia Madania Baridhara Madrasa Vice Principal Maulana Nazmul Hasan welcomed the move, calling it a "milestone" in Bangladesh's Qawmi madrasa education.

He also thanked the government for recognising Dawra-e-Hadith degree, the highest degree in Qawmi education.

"Our education system is already a well-recognised one. It has been recognised by the general people. You will see that 90 percent of our mosques, which are usually run by local communities, have imams and khatibs with a Qawmi background. This suggests its high level of acceptance among people. But we lacked official recognition, which we have got now."

"Having official recognition is a matter of practical necessity. This decision, when it comes into effect, will open up a lot of doors for our graduates. If I understand correctly, they can now apply for government jobs, and other initiatives and programmes where having a government-approved certificate is a precondition."

"Earlier, we couldn't work at public mosques because our certificates were not recognised. But now we can," he added.

Master's Degree (Islamic Studies and Arabic)", would have retrospective effect and those who have acquired Dawra-e-Hadith degrees after the recognition in April would be considered having master's degree, he said.

Shafiul said there would be a board named "Al-Haiyatul Uliia Lil-Jamiatil Qawmia Bangladesh" integrating the existing six Qawmi madrasa education boards.

The chairman of Befaul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh would be the ex-officio chairman of the 17-member integrated board. The board chairman can co-opt one or more persons as the members of the board, but the number of such members would not exceed 15, reported the news agency.

Shafiul said the board would prepare syllabus, question papers, conduct examinations, evaluate answer scripts, and award certificates among the students of Qawmi madrasas.

Besides, the status of the post graduate degree would be effective for the madrasas having registration with the board.

BACKGROUND

The issue of recognising Qawmi madrasa education first came to the fore during the tenure of the BNP-Jamaat government.

On August 21, 2006, just three months before leaving office, the then PM Khaleda Zia said the government decided to recognise Dawra certificates. However, the decision could not be implemented as the required process could not be completed.

But a section of Qawmi madrasa teachers and Islamic thinkers kept up

the pressure.

In the face of their demand, the Awami League-led grand alliance government took an initiative to recognise Qawmi madrasas and reform their education system.

On April 15, 2012, the education ministry formed a 17-member commission comprised of Qawmi scholars, with Shah Ahmed Shafi in the chair, to improve Qawmi education and provide students with knowledge and skills needed for the job market. Maulana Masoud was made co-chair of the commission.

The commission on April 13, 2013, submitted a draft policy, outlining the curriculum, evaluation system and six tiers of Qawmi education.

It also proposed introducing certificates for each tier -- primary, junior secondary, SSC, HSC, honours and master's -- and a syllabus, including for Bangla, English, mathematics and social science, up to at least the higher secondary level.

Based on the draft policy, the ministry prepared a proposal to make a law and set up a body -- Qawmi Madrasa Education Authority -- with government representatives and experts in it.

The proposal was scheduled to be placed at a cabinet meeting on October 28, 2013, for approval.

But the ministry pulled the draft following threats from the Qawmi madrasa community, especially the Hefajat.

The Islamist group then started claiming that the government wanted to control the Qawmi madrasas in the name of the recognition.

The initiative was shelved then.

However, the ministry revived the plan. On September 27, 2016, it formed a committee headed by Maulana Masoud to find a way to recognise certificates of Qawmi madrasas.

But it faced opposition from Hefajat again. Then the government issued a circular reviving the commission led by Shafi. The body was asked to come up with ways to recognise the certificates.

In line with its suggestion, the then government proceeded to recognise the Qawmi madrasa certificates.

On March 28 last year, the education ministry had a discussion on the issue of recognising the certificates. At a meeting, ministry officials said the government would gradually start recognising Qawmi madrasa certificates from elementary level. But the madrasa authorities pressed that the government give recognition to their Dawra-e-Hadith certificate to help madrasa students get jobs.

Finally, the ministry accepted the proposals of the Qawmi madrasa authorities, backed by Chittagong-based group Hefajat.

Serajul Islam

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general education should be kept separate. Mixing up the two will be harmful. It will create confusion among people as these are completely different. There is no similarity between the two," the eminent educationist told The Daily Star.

"The quality of their [Qawmi] education doesn't match with that of mainstream education. People will raise questions about the standard of the degrees in both formats. The degrees in mainstream education have been undermined through this move," he pointed out.

Manzoorul Islam

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academic decision, the greater interest of students should be kept in mind.

Manzoorul, a former teacher at Dhaka University, said whenever he talked to madrasa students, he found them frustrated about getting jobs. But madrasa students also have the right to get proper education and lead an enlightened life.

"It seems the decision is not practical without a revision of the syllabus and curriculum. I think the government still has the option to revise those so that madrasa students can get better education and play a role in building the nation," he added.

Rasheda

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equivalence between the two types of degrees.

"There are many streams in the existing mainstream education, and efforts are being made to reduce discrimination in it. But in the name of mainstreaming madrasa education, this type of wholesale recognition might create complexity in future."

Rasheda, also executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said most of the Qawmi madrasas in the country have no approval. This means, the students, who pass from these unapproved madrasas, will also get a recognised degree which could add to complexity.

"Madrasa education is completely different. So I think government will explain under which consideration it has given the recognition," she added.

Farid Uddin

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He thanked the prime minister, saying this matter would not have progressed this far without her interest.

Farid Uddin further said that due to this decision, Qawmi madrasa students will now be able to get jobs.

Asked about the curriculum, Farid Uddin, also the imam of Sholakia Eidgah in Kishoreganj, said there is no need to update or improve the Dawra Hadith but curriculum and syllabus at lower levels of Qawmi education may need to be improved.

270 expat workers

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The allegations come amid a crackdown on undocumented migrants in Malaysia. The government launched the drive on July 1 after the rehiring programme had ended on June 30.

Earlier on February 15, 2016, the Malaysian government opened the programme to regularise illegal migrants.

Malaysian Bar Council in a statement early last month said the government had appointed three private companies to register the undocumented migrants for regularisation. However, a lot of brokers involved in the process took undue advantage of the migrants' vulnerability to defraud them.

According to migrants and rights activists, nearly one million Bangladeshis now live in Malaysia. About half of them were either waiting for regularisation or defrauded by the agents and brokers.

Imran, who has been working in Malaysia for about seven years, said he along with many other workers had sought the services of the company, which is based in Klang Valley, to obtain valid working permits to continue working in the country.

"We went to the office multiple times to inquire about the status of our applications until before the June 30 deadline for the rehiring programme."

"However, the man who runs the company kept making up excuses," he said.

Another Bangladeshi, Mohammad Alamgir, said they looked for the company's owner and even waited outside the immigration office on the last day of the rehiring programme.

"From June 27, the owner kept assuring us that our applications will go through and we will get our permits."

"Our hopes were dashed when the deadline passed with no permits," he

said.

Alamgir claimed the owner, when confronted, threatened him and the other workers.

"He warned us against reporting the matter to the authorities. However, we will not be deterred," he said.

The group of workers, who are mainly from the construction sector from the Klang Valley and some other states, said they have reported the matter to the police, the immigration authorities as well as the Bangladesh High Commission.

"We want justice. We hope the Malaysian authorities can assist us in getting our permits," said Alamgir.

Mohammad Salam, a Bangladeshi worker, called The Daily Star from Kuala Lumpur yesterday and said he paid RM 7000 to a Bangladeshi broker in December last year for a work permit, but was defrauded.

After paying the broker, Salam contacted him several times, but the broker only asked him to "wait".

The victim said no employer was hiring them now as the crackdown on undocumented migrants was underway.

"I have been living with a friend in Kuala Lumpur for over a month. I can neither go home nor work and earn a living here," said Salam from Bangladesh's Shariatpur district.

Correction

In the story "Breaking a Taboo" published on Sunday on page 2, a programme was mistakenly mentioned as "an initiative of a Dhaka based voluntary organisation Bojromushthi".

The initiative was actually taken by "Alokito Agami", a Dhaka based volunteer organisation, under their campaign "Donate a Pad for hygiene Bangladesh" with the help of Bojromushthi, an organisation of Pabna.

No bail yet for the 22

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The eight students are: Rashedul Islam, Mushfiqur Rana, Hasan, Zahidul Haque, Nur Mohammad, Saber Ahmed, Shihab Shahriar and Shakhawat Hossain.

On Sunday, four other students were denied bail by the same court.

On Thursday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Satyabrata Sikder denied bail to 22 on completion of their two-day remand.

Their bail petitions were also rejected on August 7.

A total of 41 people, including the 22, have been arrested in 29 cases filed under the Penal Code over clashes in the capital during student demonstra-

tions for road safety.

At least 20 others, including several students, were arrested in nine cases filed under section 57 of the ICT Act on charges of spreading rumours, propaganda and fake news over the protest.

Six of the cases were filed with police stations in Dhaka and one each in Chittagong, Sirajganj and Bogra.

Alleged ruling party men who attacked road safety demonstrators and journalists were not accused in any of the cases.

The complainants of the 29 cases filed with 16 police stations mentioned that the attackers were unknown students and many of them were in school or college uniforms

during clashes.

The case documents state that some of the accused were infiltrators.

During the widespread demonstrations that followed the killing of two college students by a speeding bus on July 29, alleged ruling party men and law enforcers attacked protesters in areas including Jhigatola, Dhanmondi, Science Laboratory intersection, Uttara and Mirpur.

Many of the attackers wore helmets and carried sticks, sharp weapons and firearms.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary yesterday told a press conference that he instructed Dhaka Metropolitan Police

to scrutinise video footage and other information to identify the attackers.

During the quota reform movement, alleged Bangladesh Chhatra League activists attacked demonstrators at least 18 times since May. Around 75 students of four universities were injured, but none of the attackers were sued or arrested.

Some of the injured were arrested or allegedly driven out of hospitals.

The BCL men, who attacked Rajshahi University student Torikul Islam with hammer, sharp weapon and bamboo sticks, were identified. But they were not arrested.

Seven quota reformist leaders are now in jail.