



Bangladeshi teens bring the entire traffic system to its knees demanding safer roads

Barely two months after the quota reform movement began in April, the government faced another student protest. Led by students who were even younger, the movement received and wide support acclaim from the public. A race between two Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan buses led to the death of two teenagers who were waiting to go home from school. That very day, Airport Road was blocked briefly by a few hundred students. Shipping minister and transport leader Shajahan Khan's amused reaction regarding the issue the same day—he compared the death of the two Bangladeshi students to the 33 who had earlier died in a train accident in India and wondered why such a big deal was being made out of it—only added fuel to the fire. Thousands of students joined the protests from the next day onwards and demanded his resignation.

In the next two weeks, Dhaka dwellers witnessed things that they hadn't seen for a long time. Police officers and ministers driving without licenses were being stopped by children as young as eight to ten years old; an emergency lane was carved out during the protests and students were seen maintaining discipline on the roads. A week later though, men in helmets (allegedly members of the BCL) began attacking the protestors with iron rods and sticks and the protests took a violent turn. At least 150 protestors were injured and journalists were attacked as well.

As a result of the violence, the protests died out 10 days later. It compelled the government to pass the Road Transport Act 2018. Analysts though stated that the law would protect the interests of the owners and that it wouldn't make much of a difference.

100 days of solitude

Photojournalist and activist Shahidul Alam was abducted from his home on the night of August 5, shortly after giving an interview to *Al Jazeera*, in which he criticised the government on its handling of student protests for road safety, and for posting Facebook live videos documenting the protests and the crackdown on those. Appearing in court the next day limping, Alam stated that he had been beaten in custody.

Released on bail on November 20 after 107 days in detention at Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj, Alam faces up to 14 years in prison if convicted on charges under the infamous section 57 of the ICT Act 2006 (amended in 2013) which penalises spreading "propaganda through social media" and "hurting the image of the state".



Minimum wage is bare minimum indeed

The government on September 13, 2018 raised the minimum monthly wage for 4.4 million garment workers to Tk 8,000 from the existing Tk 5,300 with effect from December. While the government and factory owners celebrated this as a 51 percent wage hike, many labour leaders pointed out that the wage increase only represented an increase of 18 percent—given the five percent yearly increment that each worker is entitled to. This means that the new wage hike represents an increase of only 18 percent. Meanwhile, a study published by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) this year highlighted that the average monthly expenditure for a worker increased by a whopping 85 percent over the last five years. Their basic salary actually decreased as a percentage of their total income. This is significant for garment workers as a lot of their benefits, including their overtime pay, is calculated on the basis of their basic.

August 21 grenade attack verdict

Two cases filed over the August 21, 2004 grenade attack at an Awami League rally in Dhaka brought in verdicts on October 10. A special tribunal found all the 38 accused guilty, including BNP senior vice chairman Tarique Rahman (currently living in exile in London) and former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, of the bomb attack that killed 24 and injured scores of others. Rahman, son of ex-Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, was given life imprisonment along with 18 others. Babar and 18 others were given the death penalty.



Jamaat over and out?



The Election Commission cancelled the registration of Jamaat-e-Islami in October, five years after a 2013 High Court verdict declaring the party's registration illegal. Nevertheless, Jamaat candidates were present at the polls as part of the BNP-led alliance. 22 out of 25 Jamaat candidates contested under 'sheaf of paddy' while three candidates ran as independents. All 22 candidates under the opposition alliance boycotted on election day due to an "unfair voting atmosphere".

#MeToo: the movement that almost happened



The #MeToo movement started on social media and spread like wildfire bringing down generations of powerful men accused of sexual harassment in 2017. More recently, the Indian media also reinforced the movement when both young promising and prominent media personalities shared their stories of sexual harassment. And soon enough, #MeToo came crashing onto the shores of Bangladesh as well. As accusations of sexual harassment against many top newsroom leaders and officials of publishing houses, among others, slowly started to flood social media, Bangladesh too—in a limited sphere—started to experience the impact of #MeToo. Survivors who spoke up were subjected to a witch hunt, their characters and motives for speaking up called into question. As yet, there has been no disclosure of any investigation findings into the #MeToo allegations against senior newsmen.