



Fellow students taking Shoyeb Mahmud to a hospital and try to feed him water on the way after he fell sick while on hunger strike for Ducus re-polls yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Protesters end

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around 2:00pm on Tuesday. They started the protest after allegations of polls irregularities surfaced. Later, two others joined them.

Meanwhile, the newly-elected officer bearers of Ducus and hall unions are set to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhavan this afternoon.

Earlier yesterday, three hunger strikers fell sick on the fourth day of their protest.

The protesters' 72-hour ultimatum, asking the authorities to meet their four-point demand, will expire today.

Shoyeb Mahmud, who ran for the post of literary secretary of Shahidullah hall students' union, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital after he became unconscious during a "Bhukha Michil" (Hunger Procession) in the afternoon.

Besides, Meem Arafat Manob, who contested the March 11 polls for the post of Ducus international affairs secretary, and Al Mahmud Taha, a second-year student of Zoology, were also admitted to the hospital as they became ill.

Around 4:00pm, the hunger strikers along with around 50 other students brought out the procession. As it reached near the VC's residence, Shobeb, second-year student of physics, became unconscious, said protesters. A few minutes later, Meem, a mas-

ter's student of computer science and engineering, complained of feeling unwell and had to be hospitalised.

The protesters said they would come up with a fresh agitation programme on Monday. They took the decision considering the weekend today and a public holiday tomorrow.

"We will announce our next course of action on Monday," said Liton Nandi, Ducus VP candidate from Pragatishil Chhatra Oikya panel.

The four-point demand include announcement of a re-election schedule, resignation of all teachers and staff members involved in the "farical" election, formation of a neutral election committee and withdrawal of all cases filed against the protesting students.

Visiting the hunger strikers earlier yesterday, Ducus VP-elect Nur said he would reconsider taking the VP's office.

The protesters also asked whether Nur and Akhter Hossen, Ducus social services secretary-elect, would go to the Gono Bhavan.

Nur in reply said he was positive about going to the PM's residence as she herself invited them.

"From the very beginning of the protest, I have been demanding a re-election. But we have to take a decision after consultation with everyone. We have to inform the prime minister about the situation," Nur told protesters.

President, PM

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recovery of the injured ones, the message added.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also condemned yesterday's shooting in New Zealand that killed at least 49 people and injured more than 20.

In a message to the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Hasina expressed her deep shock over the attack on New Zealand mosques which is termed as "one of the darkest days" in New Zealand's history by Ardern, reported BSS.

A gunman yesterday opened fire on two mosques in Christchurch -- Masjid Al Noor and Linwood -- during Friday prayers.

Describing the attack as a "very well-planned event", New Zealand's Police Commissioner Mike Bush told reporters that as many as 41 people died at one mosque, seven at another and one person died in hospital.

The man charged with murder is in his late 20s and should appear in Christchurch court on Saturday, Bush added.

In another message, Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen expressed his grave concern over the attack.

"We don't have any mission in New Zealand but we are getting updates about the attack through our Australian High Commissioner Sufur Rahman," the foreign minister said.

Mentioning that New Zealand is a safe and terrorism-free country, Momen said it is a tragic incident for the country indeed.

Responding to a query over possi-

bility of such attack in Bangladesh, Momen said, "We are highly active in resisting such evil attempts in our country and our security forces are doing a good job in this regard."

Along with the president and the prime minister, Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury also condemned the attack that claimed so many lives in a barbaric manner.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Planning Minister MA Manna, Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman and State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, among others, condemned the killing.

FAKHRUL CONDEMNS

NZ ATTACK

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also condemned the terror attack.

Fakhrul, in a statement, offered deep condolences to the New Zealand government and urged them to find out the attacker.

"I hope the New Zealand government would ensure exemplary punishment to the attacker," he added.

Law Minister Anisul Huq also condemned the terror attack on the worshippers at the two mosques in New Zealand.

Expressing his deep condolences and sorrow, Anisul, in his statement, prayed for the salvation of the departed souls and expressed his sympathy to the bereaved family members.

'Can't imagine something like this'

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in 1998. He was stunned by yesterday's massacre.

"This is a disaster for New Zealand. A black day," said Hamzah, who had blood on his clothes from trying to help the wounded. "I can't imagine something like this happening at all. It hasn't sunk into my head yet. I think I'll go into shock over the next couple of days. I hope I am strong enough. We have to bury a lot of people."

'RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES'

Mohan Ibrahim is one of around 400 people who were praying inside the mosque when the shooting began.

"I didn't get a glimpse of the gunman as I was in the next room, but all of a sudden we heard the shots being fired and people just started running for their lives. I'm still in shock."

"A lot of people have been killed and many are injured. I can see a girl dead in the middle of the road," Ibrahim said through tears.

"I am scared for my friends. Some are still inside and we have been calling but can't get hold of them," Ibrahim said.

Ibrahim said his friends who were at the other mosque in Linwood had called him saying the shooting occurred there at the same time.

"I have friends at both Islamic centres - it's terrifying and I don't know what to do."

He said it was completely unexpected. "You think New Zealand is the safest place in the world, it's just really unexpected."

Sophie Nears, 19, told the Herald her friend had called her screaming

that he had been shot in the leg and he was hysterical - she did not know if her friend was alive.

"He just hung up and I haven't been able to get back in contact with him. I've never heard him cry before. He was screaming that heaps of people were dead and then the line just cut out."

SHOT MAN SOUGHT HELP

A Christchurch resident heard up to 20-40 gunshots and soon a shooting victim arrived at the house with a bullet wound 7cm into his leg.

A young man and his three flatmates, who live on Brockworth Place near Masjid Al Noor Mosque, rushed to the aid of a male Muslim who fled to his house after the mass shooting.

"I had to deal with that really quickly considering I just woke up," he said. "We called an ambulance and police and I applied pressure to the wound. It's just human nature to help someone in that situation."

When the Muslim man ran into their house he told the young man that he had just been at the mosque, multiple shots were fired and he fled the scene immediately looking for help.

"[The victim said] he didn't see the armed gunman but he heard bullets ringing around, one had just missed his stomach area. He would have had a far more serious injury in that case," he said.

"I thought he was making it up ... I didn't realise something of this magnitude could happen in New Zealand. I was just in an utter panic."

The bullet was embedded 7cm into the man's leg.

'RUNNING AND SCREAMING'

A 14-year-old witness to the mosque shooting has described the "running and screaming" that followed.

Idris Khairuddin says prayers were just about to begin when he heard multiple gunshots.

"At first I thought it was just like construction work or something, then people were all running and screaming," said the 14-year-old Hillmorton High School student.

His uncle Tamizi was one of about six persons he knew had been shot. Idris said he was sitting near the door. He said he saw people falling down but wasn't sure if they were injured.

"I just ran as fast as I could, over the fence to Hagley Park, I didn't stop," he said. "The gun shots sounded like pop, pop, pop... I heard over 50."

Idris and his uncle were both Malaysians living in Christchurch. "My uncle got shot in his backside, I am just praying it is not too serious. This week is the first time I went to the mosque... I am still shaking, and I am traumatised," Idris said.

He said everything was a chaos as people scrambled to get out of the mosque.

CHILD PLAYED OUTSIDE MOSQUE Rahimi Ahmad, 39, went for Friday prayers at the Masjid Al Noor Mosque in Deans Avenue with his 11-year-old son as he did every week.

His son was playing outside when gunshots were heard in the mosque - another mosque-goer grabbed his hand and took him for shelter at a house next door.

However, no one knows what has

happened to Rahimi. His wife, Azila, says she is waiting anxiously to hear from him.

"I just want to know he's safe, and I'm praying and hoping that he will call," she said.

"Rahimi has his mobile phone with him, so I'm sure he will be able to get in contact soon. But right now I don't know what's happened to him."

Rahimi went to the mosque at around 1:00pm with his son, she said.

But when she heard news about the shooting, she got worried about their safety.

She got a call from her friend saying her son was safe, but Rahimi was believed to be inside the mosque at the time of the shooting.

"My son was playing outside, so when the shooting happened, a friend just grabbed him and took him to a Kiwi's house next to the mosque," Azila said.

MISSING PERSONS WEBSITE

Police are also making an effort to inform the public of the Restoring Family Links (RFL) website where people can register missing persons or register themselves as alive.

The Red Cross has been asked by police to activate the website due to yesterday's massacre in Christchurch.

The RFL website is a tool where the public can self-register they are alive so family and friends know they are safe. Members of the public can also register missing persons.

People living in New Zealand can also register missing persons on 0800 115 019, and a member of police will get in touch with you.

The longest 10 minutes of my life

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I was given shelter by the players with the situation of the city in mind. They actually insisted that I stay in the room until it was safe for me to return to my hotel.

It's 12:00am midnight here in Christchurch. We have just watched the video of the shooting from the killer who recorded that massacre live and just looked at each other, mouths agape in disbelief.

After a while, Tamim received a phone call from his son, who asked: "Baba, how are you?"

"Baba, I survived today and I am coming to you soon," was the reply from Tamim.

Going back to the start of the day, which was just like another day in New Zealand and everything was calm, but nature may have been warning us -- it was gloomy and the skies were dark, but I thought it was just another day in a country where the weather keeps changing.

As a journalist, it was a very important day for me as it was the day before the third and final Test between Bangladesh and New Zealand -- eventually cancelled by both boards -- and so I reached the Hagley Oval by 12:45pm.

Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah was scheduled to attend the pre-match press conference around 1:15pm, and the team bus arrived at the ground just before that.

The plan for the team was to have their lunch and then go to the nearby mosque, Masjid Al Noor, for Friday prayers, before starting the training session. There was talk about whether the team would go to Lincoln University to use the indoor facilities as overnight rain had rendered the outer nets of the Hagley Oval unusable.

Mahmudullah was five minutes late to the press conference as he had a meeting with head coach Steve

Rhodes -- it was around 1:25pm. Mahmudullah rushed towards the press conference area when a journalist told him that he forgot his cap, which is mandatory for press meets, keeping the sponsors in mind. He went back again and it took two more minutes for him to return and attend the press meet.

These were actually the valuable minutes that eventually saved the whole team from being at the wrong place at precisely the wrong time. The players on the team bus were eagerly awaiting their captain's arrival to go to the mosque. A total of 17 members, including team manager Khaled Masud, analyst Shrinivas Chandrasekharan, and masseur Md Sohel, finally boarded the bus at around 1:35pm. Nayeem Hasan and Liton Das, along with spin coach Sunil Joshi, were not in the bus as they opted to stay at the hotel.

I had not had breakfast and was hungry, so was heading towards a restaurant. All of a sudden I received a phone call around 1:52pm from Tamim, who had previously called another journalist.

"Can you please call the police and tell them to save us. There is a gunfight taking place inside the mosque," Tamim told me with a quiver in his voice.

I could not believe it and thought it was a prank. When Tamim realised I had not taken the matter seriously he literally shouted at me and said: "I am not joking, please call the police!"

That was the moment that the gravity of the moment hit me like a ton of bricks -- or a shower of bullets -- and I called the police and started running towards the mosque. But I was not sure why I was heading in that direction.

Just when I reached the main road along with two other journalists from Bangladesh, a lady with a car stopped and said that she was also heading

towards the place where the incident was taking place and asked whether we wanted to go there. We jumped into the car and headed towards the mosque, eventually getting off the car in front of a hotel.

It was around 1:58pm that I started running towards the mosque and soon I saw a body lying limp on the ground just near the entrance of a motel, being attended by paramedics.

As I ran further I saw a man walking towards me with blood all over his body. Still, my instincts told me to run towards the mosque as I saw the Bangladesh players disembark the bus just opposite the mosque and come towards me. I saw Mushfiqur Rahim crying and saying: "I have seen dead bodies."

The rest of the members warned me not to go further as we all took the route towards Hagley Park and headed towards the stadium.

It was the first time in my life that I have experienced the fear of death and I kept looking back, panic barely concealed, fearing someone might shoot me from behind.

It was the longest 10-minute walk of my life as, along with the members of the Bangladesh team, we finally reached the Hagley Oval where we got inside the dressing room.

The journalists were later taken to the Hadlee Pavilion, where we saw all the staff and grounds members gathered together.

The Bangladesh team were later escorted to the team hotel around 2:50pm safely, but we the journalists waited at the stadium.

After an hour we were also taken to the team hotel with the help of New Zealand cricket officials in their cars and we once again met the cricketers before team manager Masud briefed the whole incident to the media.

It was a Friday night, usually a party night in Christchurch, but last night there was not even a dog to be

seen on the streets; only the sounds of police helicopters overhead. The Bangladesh team slept six or seven to a room last night.

Back to the day's horrors, it was around 1:45pm when the team bus was stopped by a lady just opposite the mosque as she shouted that there was a gunfight going on in the mosque. The bus, however, kept going for another few metres when another lady came out of her car and warned the bus driver not to go further.

That was the moment when the players realised there was something seriously wrong as they started seeing people coming out of the mosque with blood all over their bodies. The players ducked their heads beneath the window line and a few were crying, while others were peeping through the window.

It was around eight minutes that the team were left alone without any security. Talking about security, I have not witnessed any security personnel with the Bangladesh team throughout the tour. There was no security when the team went to the ground or even at the hotel, and that is perhaps because New Zealand is known as one of the safest countries in the world.

Going back to those eight horrific minutes in the bus, Tamim eventually decided that the team should move out of the bus and walk through Hagley Park towards the stadium.

Just a few minutes had passed between the gunman actually leaving the mosque after the massacre and the team bus arriving outside the place of worship. Had Mahmudullah not left his cap in the dressing room or if he hadn't attended the meeting with Rhodes which caused six to seven-minute delay... I don't want to finish that sentence.

But for me, my hands are still shaking and I don't know whether I will ever be able to forget this day for the rest of my life.

NZ gun laws

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Despite those laws, New Zealand's weapons legislation is considered more relaxed than most Western countries outside of the USA.

Unlike the UK and Australia, New Zealand does not ban the ownership of semi-automatic military-style assault weapons. Most guns can be legally sold on the internet or through newspaper ads. Gun owners do need a license but they aren't required to register their guns.

While authorities do not know exactly how many legally or illegally owned firearms are currently in circulation in New Zealand, estimates put the number at about 1.2 million, according to New Zealand Police. This figure equates to about one gun for every three people -- a rate that is considered high when compared with Australia, which has 3.15 million guns, approximately one for every eight people.

That said, gun-inflicted fatalities remain relatively low in New Zealand. The number of gun homicides per year in the decade up to 2015 was in the dozens, according to figures compiled by the University of Sydney. This equated to an annual rate of about one death per 100,000 people -- in contrast to the United States, which had 12 deaths per 100,000 people in 2017.

Potential gun owners in New Zealand must be over the age of 16 and pass a police background check, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

GUN LAWS IN AUSTRALIA

Gun laws in Australia were tightened following a 1996 mass shooting in which 35 people were killed by a lone gunman in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Within two weeks, Australian lawmakers banned rapid-fire rifles and shotguns and introduced tighter laws governing ownership of other weapons. New applicants must undergo thorough background

checks and present a "justifiable reason" for ownership -- with self defense not applicable.

The laws have had a dramatic effect on the frequency of mass shootings, as well as homicides. In the years after the Port Arthur massacre, the risk of dying by gunshot in Australia fell by more than 50% -- and stayed there.

A 2012 study by Andrew Leigh of Australian National University and Christine Neill of Wilfrid Laurier University also found the two nationwide, federally funded gun buybacks and voluntary surrenders of firearms led to a drop in firearm suicide rates of almost 80% in the following decade.

Using those measures, Australia collected and destroyed more than a million firearms, perhaps a third of the national stock, according to Professor Philip Alpers of the University of Sydney, who is editor of gunpolicy.org. The national government also banned the importation of new automatic and semiautomatic weapons. And the buyback was paid for by a special one-off tax on all Australians.

NZ POLICE SUPPORT

CARRYING GUNS

New Zealand police officers are not routinely armed, but recent figures suggest more officers are in favour of carrying guns.

A 2017 survey from the New Zealand Police Associated showed that that 66% of its members support arming officers.

That figure has significantly increased from a decade ago, when 48% of officers supported general arming in 2008.

Police figures also show that in the decade to 2017-18, there were 28 homicides involving a firearm where the offender had a current firearms licence, and 126 homicides where the offender had never held a firearms licence.