



Ex-minister Abul Hossain no more

STAR REPORT

Former communications minister and freedom fighter Syed Abul Hossain died of cardiac arrest at a city hospital early yesterday. He was 72. He breathed his last around 2:05am while undergoing treatment at United Hospital, family sources said.

He is survived by his wife, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers.

As his children are currently abroad, any decision regarding his burial would be taken after their return, they added.

Born in Madaripur in 1951, Abul Hossain was first elected as a member of parliament from Madaripur-3 constituency in 1991 as an Awami League candidate. He was elected lawmaker three more times after that.

In his district, he was known for establishing many schools and colleges, and had a huge impact on the local education.

A year after becoming state minister for LGRD in 1996, he had to resign over a controversy related to the use of a private passport instead of a diplomatic one.

He served as the communications minister in the AL-led government from 2009 to 2011 and then as ICT minister from 2011 to 2012.

He was removed from the communications ministry after the World Bank brought corruption allegations against him and suspended its loan for the construction of the Padma Bridge.

In 2012, he resigned as the ICT minister. He, however, always maintained that he was never involved in any corruption.

The Anti-Corruption Commission exonerated him from the charges and a Canada court said it found no proof of the allegations against him.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen shakes hands with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the EU Global Gateway Forum 2023 in Brussels yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hefazat demands release of its men by November 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam yesterday placed a fresh 13-point demand, including the release of all its arrested leaders and activists and the withdrawal of the cases against them by November 30.

"If the demands are not met, we will go for a tougher movement," said Sajidur Rahman, secretary general of the Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation at its "National Ulama-Masayek" convention held in the capital's Engineers Institute.

Speaking at the event, Hefazat Amir Mohibullah Babunagari said the government must release their leaders if it wants to stay in power.

"If the government does not release our arrested leaders immediately, we do not know where it would end up. If it wants to stay in power, [it must] release my leaders right away."

Azizul Haque, the organisation's joint secretary general, said, "Our leaders Mamunul Haque, Monir Hossain, Fakhruzzaman, and many others have been in jail under false cases for nearly three years.

"Despite getting bails from the courts, our leaders were not released. Fresh cases are being filed to keep them behind bars. It [release of their leaders] has now become a public demand."

At the convention, Hefazat leaders announced the formation of committees at the district, upazila, and metropolitan levels within the next three months.

The organisation is supposed to hold conventions in Chattogram, Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Narayanganj, and Gazipur by December 31.

Record 114m people now displaced worldwide: UN

AFP, Geneva

The number of people worldwide living in forced displacement from their homes is estimated to have exceeded 114 million -- a record figure, the United Nations said yesterday.

"The number of people displaced by war, persecution, violence and human rights violations globally is likely to have exceeded 114 million at the end of September," UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said in a statement.

The main drivers in the first half of 2023 were the conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo; a prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan; and a combination of drought, floods and insecurity in Somalia, UNHCR said.

"The world's focus now is -- rightly -- on the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. But globally, far too many conflicts are proliferating or escalating, shattering innocent lives and uprooting people," said UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi.

"The international community's inability to solve conflicts or prevent new ones is driving displacement and misery. We must look within, work together to

end conflicts and allow refugees and other displaced people to return home or restart their lives," he said in a statement.

In its Mid-Year Trends Report, which analyses forced displacement during the first six months of 2023, UNHCR said that by the end of June, 110 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide.

That figure was up 1.6 million from the end of 2022.

A UNHCR spokesman confirmed to AFP the new figure was a record since the agency began collecting data in 1975.

Since Israel launched withering strikes on Gaza in response to an unprecedented cross-border attack by Hamas militants on October 7, the number of people internally displaced within Gaza is estimated at about 1.4 million, according to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA.

More than half of all people who are forced to flee never cross an international border, UNHCR said.

Its mid-year report said that globally, almost one-third of all forcibly displaced people originated from just three countries: Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine.

EC can do nothing if any party stays away from polls

Says Election Commissioner Anisur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Election Commissioner Md Anisur Rahman has said the Election Commission has nothing to do if any political party does not take part in elections.

"Political parties know it very well what is mentioned in the manual [a book prepared for officials and candidates with all electoral laws and regulations and the code of conduct]. It is up to the political parties whether they will participate in polls. The Election Commission has nothing to do in this regard. Elections will be participatory if the voters take part," he added.

Anisur was talking to journalists before a views-exchange meeting with the polls officials for the Brahmanbaria 2 by-election at the town's Shilpakala Academy yesterday afternoon.

The commissioner said, "The commission does not see anything for which it can be said that there is no election environment in the country."

He said the EC last year had invited 44 registered political parties to talks on the general election and most of them responded.

"Later, the chief election commissioner invited the general secretary of the party which did not participate in the dialogue, Anisur said.

"We cannot solve political problems and this is not mandatory for us. The Election Commission is working to create a level playing field for holding the next general election."

BSMMU welcomes its first test tube baby

UNB, Dhaka

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) has welcomed its very first test tube baby.

The baby was born through a caesarean section at 9:30am on Tuesday, said BSMMU's Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr Md Sharifuddin Ahmed, who was present during the surgical procedure.

He said the parents of the baby had from Barishal and struggled with infertility for 13 years. In 2022, they turned to the BSMMU's Infertility Department. After some thorough check-ups and when the time was right, they were advised to try ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection), a form of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) IVF that involves injecting live sperm into a person's eggs in a laboratory.

Finally, in February 2023, the mother became pregnant. She was under regular checkups till the baby was born, he said.

A team of 17 doctors and 5 nurses performed the caesarean section under the supervision of Dr Jasmin Banu, chairman of the Department of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility.

Road accident kills youth

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A youth died after a vehicle hit him in Dhaka's Matuail area yesterday afternoon.

Mehedi Hasan, 23, was a madrasa student in Savar. An eyewitness said the accident happened around 3:00pm when Mehedi was crossing the busy road near Matuail U-turn area.

Mehedi was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 4:00pm.

BB drawing up roadmap to tackle 3 key challenges

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governor Abdur Rouf Talukder about the extent of political will in implementing the roadmap.

He cited the case of many banking sector reform measures that were undertaken but never followed through.

The government did not take any significant steps to control the spiralling classified loans and the irregularities in the financial sector.

"[BB officials] said there is a firm political commitment this time," said Raihan, also a professor at the University of Dhaka's economic department.

At the meetings with economists, Md Habibur Rahman, BB's chief economist, presents the current economic situation, the main challenges and the steps taken by BB to revive the economy.

Market syndicates, under-invoicing, over-invoicing, unethical business practices, wilful default culture and weak corporate governance are also to blame for the current fragile state of the economy, according to the central bank.

The roadmap will have measures such as a floating exchange rate, market-based interest rate and bringing down defaulted loans by way of good governance.

Hasina is serious about establishing good governance in the banking sector, the BB officials said.

All the problems in the economy began when the interest rate was capped in April 2020. Then the central bank extended loan moratoriums several times.

"Both were wrong decisions. The right policy was not taken at the right time, but the wrong policy was pursued," Raihan said.

EC in full gear with key issues unresolved

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polling centres will be finalised in due time," Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Against this backdrop, majority of the five election commissioners considers that the expected environment is still not there for holding a free, fair, participatory, and festive election as the political parties have not yet resolved their differences about the election-time administration.

In a concept note prepared for a workshop with journalists to be held today, the EC observed that the issue of the polls-time government is a political decision in which the commission has no role to play.

In its effort to bring different political parties on the discussion table, the EC is planning to hold a two-day workshop with all the 44 registered political parties early next month. It will be a multi-party workshop, meaning a number of political parties will be invited for discussion together although a detailed plan has not been finalised yet, a top official of the EC secretariat told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Our preparations for holding elections are going on in full swing. We will have to conduct the election in line with the constitution. There is no scope for turning back from election even if there is no political agreement," Anisur Rahman said.

"But we hope there will be a political settlement," the election commissioner told this newspaper.

Under the constitutional provision introduced in 2011, national elections must be held within 90 days before the five-year term of parliament expires.

The current parliament expires on January 29. The 90-day countdown starts on November 1.

The commission is likely to announce the schedule next month, and the election is likely to be held in early January 2024.

However, two biggest political parties -- the ruling Awami League

and opposition BNP -- stick to their guns on the election-time government.

BNP wants a caretaker government to oversee the election, while the Awami League says the election will be held under the current government as per the constitution.

BNP insists elections under the current administration will not be free and fair.

"BNP will not join the election unless held under a nonparty, neutral election-time government," BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

For the last couple of months, both parties have been holding rallies and counter-rallies across the country to show their strengths.

Although BNP is still on the streets, AL chief Sheikh Hasina started her party's polls campaign on August 2 in Rangpur.

Asked what will happen if BNP does not join polls, Anisur said, "It's too early to tell if a situation like 2014 will recur. If anything like that happens, actions will be taken accordingly."

The upcoming election is likely to be more challenging as the last two elections in 2014 and 2018 were heavily criticised by election observers, opposition political parties and analysts.

BNP and several other political parties boycotted the 2014 election. As a result, 153 out of the 300 lawmakers were elected unopposed. The 2018 election was participatory, but BNP and other opposition parties allege ballot stuffing happened the night before the election day.

In July last year, the EC held dialogues with political parties aiming to prepare its working plan for 12th national polls. BNP and eight opposition parties skipped the talks, saying they do not think the commission will be able to hold a free, fair, and participatory election.

In March this year, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal sent

a demi official letter to BNP, inviting the party for an official or unofficial discussion on the polls. But BNP did not respond, said Anisur Rahman.

Two election commissioners and several EC officials said they are preparing for the election keeping in mind that BNP and several other parties may boycott the vote.

As part of the preparation for the election, the EC has redrawn 10 constituencies, registered two new political parties, updated the voters' list, and made a primary list of 42,350 polling centres. Amendments to an electoral law have also been made. The EC has approved 67 local observers to monitor the polls and sought applications from international observers and journalists.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakawat Hossain said there is a lack of coordination among the election commissioners.

"I don't understand how they will conduct the election as some major parties are not willing to participate in it," he told this newspaper last night.

"They can't get away by saying that 'we can't do anything'. For long, we have been saying that the Election Commission can talk to the political parties. Time is running out. They can still hold talks with political parties and listen to them. After that, if they feel they can't do it, they can tell the government that there is an absence of conducive environment for the election," he noted.

Records galore

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De Leede went for 2-115 -- the worst ever ODI figures.

The Dutch were never in the chase after they lost half their side for 62 runs inside 14 overs.

Opener Vikramjit Singh scored a run-a-ball 25 before being run out by a direct throw from Maxwell.

Leg-spinner Adam Zampa returned with four wickets in his three overs and ended the match with consecutive strikes.

Shakib on a solo mission?

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While the team was travelling to Kolkata, the news of Shakib's arrival in Dhaka spread like wildfire. And to add fuel on top, much like how the team management kept concealing Shakib's injury status, no clear update was provided by the relevant authority on the situation.

A member of the team management, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star, "Honestly I don't know about Shakib and why he had to suddenly leave the team in the middle of the World Cup; that too when we are struggling badly as a unit.

"Being the leader, he should have stayed in order to motivate the players and chalk out the plans for the remaining four matches."

The Bangladesh captain was seen at the home of cricket in Mirpur later in the day, sparking even more curiosity. At the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium's indoor arena, he worked with prominent coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim -- Shakib's mentor during his developmental years at BKSP.

Barring the 40 against New Zealand, Shakib's batting in the World Cup so far has been utterly disappointing, as evidenced by his 16 runs tallied in three other games.

"I won't go into the exact details... but we did work on his batting. I think he is willing to get into the groove so we spoke about a few areas on his batting," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mahmudullah Riyad's celebration after his hundred against South Africa on Tuesday, while his team were on the brink of a massive defeat, had garnered mixed reactions aplenty to become the trending topic until Shakib left for Dhaka.

Many had hypothesized that Shakib's Dhaka trip was not purely down to cricketing reasons, rather the megastar of Bangladesh cricket may have commercial commitments to fulfil -- in line with his track record -- in the couple of days before Bangladesh take on Netherlands at

Kolkata's Eden Gardens stadium on October 28.

Fahim said that it was the responsibility of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to "make things clear" and prevent any room for speculations regarding the matter.

More questions were raised as Shakib decided to consult Fahim rather than the national coaching staff. It further raises the question of whether Shakib and his teammates would now simply concentrate on their own accomplishments going forward.

Overall, the same old pattern envelops the stories surrounding the Bangladesh team and it would be unwise to expect any clarification from anywhere.

Holding peaceful rally

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cautious in using mobile phones as those could be checked at checkpoints and on public transport.

The activists have also been requested not to roam around the Nayapaltan office and party chairperson's office in Gulshan after arriving in Dhaka.

BNP leaders alleged that police have started arresting opposition men so that they could not join the rally and that they might also dilly-dally in granting permission for the rally.

The BNP sought the Dhaka Metropolitan Police permission for the event on October 21. It is yet to get permission even though the rally is two days away.

"We are taking full preparation to hold the rally at Nayapaltan, but if we are denied permission for the rally there, we will have an alternative plan," said a senior leader of Dhaka city unit BNP.

Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of the BNP, said preparations for the rally are almost complete.

Sources said district leaders were coordinating the accommodations for their activists in Dhaka.