



Police try to take away the banner, left, of a students’ procession demanding reforms to quota system in government jobs in Tigerpass area of Chattogram city yesterday. Police trying to stop students of Comilla University, top right, from going out of their campus and blocking the Dhaka-Chattogram highway. Students surround a riot car, bottom right, after forcing their way through a police barricade at Shahbagh intersection in the capital.



PHOTO: STAR, COLLECTED

Govt free to alter, reduce or increase quota

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recruitments to the posts of 9th grade (formerly 1st class) and 10th to 13th grades (formerly 2nd class), the appointments should be made on the basis of merit. It added that the existing quota system for direct recruitment to those posts was abolished.

On June 5 this year, the HC delivered the verdict following a writ petition filed by Ohidul Islam Tushar and six other children of freedom fighters, challenging the legality of the circular.

On that day, agitators started staging demonstrations at different educational institutions, including Dhaka University, protesting the HC verdict.

They took to the streets on July 1 demanding the reinstatement of the 2018 circular.

Students at different institutions

across the country intensified their movement on July 4 as the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court did not stay the HC verdict following a government petition.

The protesters are continuing the movement now, demanding reforms to the quota system by formulating a law.

In the judgement released yesterday, the HC directed the respondents to the writ petition to restore the quota for the children and grandchildren of the freedom fighters. It also directed them to keep the quotas for district, women, people with physical challenges, ethnic groups and others, if there are any.

The HC further ordered the government authorities to publish a notification in this regard as soon as possible, preferably within three months from the date of receipt of its order.

Deputy Attorney General Sk Shaifuzzaman, who received a copy of the HC verdict's portion, told The Daily Star that the details of the findings and grounds, on which the HC delivered the verdict, would be known once the full text of the judgement is released.

He said no appeal can be moved before the Appellate Division challenging the HC verdict without the full text.

"The full text is necessary so the Appellate Division can examine whether the verdict is correct."

On July 10, the Appellate Division issued a four-week status quo on the subject matter and the HC judgement on it.

The status-quo order means the quota system will not remain in force until the Appellate Division's further order, legal experts told The Daily Star.

Names of some big fish come up in probe

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involved in the question leaks of recruitment exams of banks and medical admission tests.

It all came to light after the Criminal Investigation Department arrested 17 people, including six officials and employees of the PSC, for their involvement in leaking questions of a railway recruitment test on July 5.

According to investigators, the racket, which began its activities back in 2002, has made huge sums of money over the years.

All the arrestees had multiple suspicious transactions in their bank accounts. The CID arrested PSC office assistant Sajedul Islam with bank cheques worth Tk 10 crore in his possession, they said.

Another arrestee, PSC dispatch rider Khalilur Rahman was found to own wealth worth around Tk 50-60 crore.

Probe sources further said the syndicate had supplied the questions of the railway recruitment test to at least 300 candidates.

Abed Ali alone collected around Tk 7-8 lakh each from at least 60 of them.

The CID is now listing the names of the candidates along with those of absconding syndicate members, including former and current PSC officials.

CID Chief Mohammad Ali Miah, also additional inspector general of police, told The Daily Star yesterday, "We're conducting drives to arrest those who went into hiding after the 17 were arrested."

"We have information that the syndicate started leaking questions since 2002. We've been chasing this group for the last six months."

He said, "Many big fish are involved. We're hopeful of arresting all those involved soon."

A CID source said Abed Ali's involvement in question leaks came to light during a medical admission

test in 2010.

Cops had arrested him and some others at that time and a case was filed with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station in 2011. After the PSC was informed about Abed's involvement, he was fired in 2014.

Abed admitted his involvement after both arrests.

Sources further said that he even had links with those involved in printing exam question papers. Suspected printing press workers are being investigated in this regard.

Former army personnel Noman Siddique, another arrestee, was found involved in leaking medical exam questions in 2015, investigators said, adding that he dragged his colleague Priyonath Roy into the racket. They both tried to recommend two candidates for a job in the family planning department.

Noman was involved in leaking bank recruitment exam questions for the next couple of years as well.

Meanwhile, the CID yesterday filed prayers with a Dhaka court for a 10-day remand for each of 11 of the 17 arrestees.

No remand was sought for the six others, including Abed Ali, as they have already made confessional statements before courts following their arrests on Sunday and Monday.

Jewel Chakma, additional special superintendent of the CID, submitted the remand prayers for the 11, including two PSC deputy directors -- Abu Zafar and Jahangir Alam, and assistant director SM Alamgir Kabir, and Noman.

Asked whether action would be taken against officials whose names come up during the probe, Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain said, "If anyone breaks service rules.. if they resort to fraud or deception, action will be taken as per the law."

"We're paying close attention to this matter."

Court’s door always open to students

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the executive branch can be challenged in court."

He said that the protesters could present their arguments through lawyers and assured that the court would consider them seriously.

The chief justice urged the senior lawyers to provide necessary guidance to the protesters in this regard.

He made the remarks during an appeal hearing regarding a previous High Court verdict that made 16 recommendations to parliament for forming an independent cadre service for the Anti-Corruption Commission to build a corruption-free nation.

Earlier, the chamber judge of the Appellate Division stayed the HC verdict, saying the Supreme Court could not advise parliament.

NBFIs’ bad loans surge to a record

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Saha, also vice-chairman of Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association (BLFCA), said the loans that were disbursed in the last one or two years are regular.

"Now, most of the NBFIs are trying to do better," he said, adding that the industry is looking to upgrade its manpower for improved performance.

Md Golam Sarwar Bhuiyan, chairman of the BLFCA, said that not only the NBFIs, but the overall economy is now facing multiple challenges, and that is why the bad loans in the sector have increased.

Bad loans jumped after the central bank in 2022 withdrew the deferral facility extended during the pandemic for paying back loans, said Bhuiyan.

Due to the confidence crisis in the sector, deposits in NBFIs fell to Tk 44,304 crore in the January-March quarter from Tk 44,830 crore in the previous quarter.

Quota protests heat up

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their agitations until yesterday.

However, police yesterday said that they would take legal action if the protesters continued to block roads and cause public sufferings even after the Supreme Court "directed to maintain status quo in respect of subject matter".

Around the same time the police made the announcement, Chhatra League President Saddam Hossain in a press briefing at Dhaka University said Chhatra League was ready to face those trying to use the movement to gain political mileage.

Police yesterday mobilised additional forces and kept riot cars and water cannons in Shahbagh and some key intersections in Dhaka.

Law enforcers put barricades at Shahbagh intersection, but several thousand students coming in from Dhaka University breached it around 5:00pm.

The law enforcers, however, surrounded them and did not let them go beyond the Birdem Hospital, sparking a tussle. The students chanted "bhua" (fake) towards the police and eventually took position at Shahbagh intersection.

Somoy TV reporter Twoha Khan Tamim and cameraperson Prince Arefin were attacked at Shahbagh, the media outlet reported.

Another group of demonstrators, mostly from Dhaka College and Eden Mohila College, marched towards Shahbagh but were halted by police in New Market area.

They held a brief rally in front of Dhaka College and vowed to continue with their demonstrations.

A section of Jagannath University students joined the protesters at Shahbagh after breaking the lock on

the university main gate.

During their march towards Shahbagh, police attempted to stop them at Shankhari Bazar, in front of the CMM Court, and at Tantibazar, but failed.

CLASHES

In Cumilla, at least 10 students, including journalists Anon and Sourav of Comilla University, were injured as police charged truncheons on protesters.

"Of the injured, six were released after treatment at the Cumilla General Hospital while the rest were undergoing treatment there," Fazle Rabbi, director of CGH, told The Daily Star.

According to locals and witnesses, the protesters were chanting slogans against the police in Ansar Camp area near the university. Police charged baton to disperse them and the students retaliated by throwing brick chunks.

Police, later, fired tear gas shells, resulting in injuries, they said.

Nazmul Hasan, additional superintendent of police in Cumilla, said the police were there to save lives and properties.

In Chattogram city, at least five people were hurt in two clashes between the police and the protesters in Gate No-2 and Tigerpass areas.

Police charged truncheons on the agitators at Tigerpass around 4:40pm as the protesters tried to march defying barricades. Police used truncheons again when the protesters reached Gate No-2 area around 5:00pm.

Afterwards, the students blocked the gate area until 7:30pm.

CROSSING THE LINE

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the students were crossing the

line.

Asked if the government would take action if the students did not withdraw their protest programmes, the home minister, during a press conference, said, "They are educated and intelligent. Why would they go against the state? They should observe the situation and return."

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader urged the students to go back to their educational institutions and stop their agitation that is causing public sufferings.

The government must take legal actions if anyone tries to capitalise on the emotions of students and attempts to create anarchy, he said.

DMP Additional Commissioner (Crime and Ops) KH Mahid Uddin yesterday said they would take legal action if quota protesters continued to block roads.

There is no logic behind the movement after the Supreme Court issued a status quo order, he said urging the students to respect the law and the SC.

"The Dhaka Metropolitan Police are not only for them [students]. We are accountable to the city dwellers too," he said.

GO BACK TO CLASSROOMS

The University Grants Commission issued a letter to vice-chancellors of all universities and asked them to take necessary measures to bring the anti-quota demonstrators back to classrooms and create an environment conducive to education.

It said the students should return to their educational institutions and resume studies.

"If the protesting students wish, they can present their arguments to the court through their lawyer. The court would consider it ...," it said.

Dhaka now has to play its cards right

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advantage of the new relationship with China," he said.

The two sides agreed to deepen cooperation in trade, investment and finance, and to conclude the joint feasibility study on a China-Bangladesh free trade agreement.

"This will significantly boost trade between the two countries," said Kabir, also the president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, a non-profit, non-political research centre.

China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner by a wide margin, with bilateral trade amounting to upwards of \$25 billion. However, Bangladesh's exports account for less than 3 percent of the sum.

"China has completed the entry procedures for Bangladesh's fresh mango exports to China, and welcomes Bangladesh to expand exports of jute, leather, aquatic products and other high-quality special products to China. The two sides agreed to further strengthen communication on the export of high-quality Bangladeshi agricultural products to China," the joint statement said.

Ahead of the three-day visit, there was expectation that Beijing would provide a \$5 billion loan in yuan for trade facilitation to help Bangladesh cope with the strain on

currency reserves, and billions more for projects.

At a press briefing after Hasina's meeting with Li Qiang on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said China has agreed to provide 1 billion yuan (about \$137 million) in assistance. However, the joint statement does not mention this assistance extended to Bangladesh.

China has now become more cautious in giving out loans after it was blamed for the economic crisis in some countries such as Sri Lanka, said Kabir, who served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Nepal and the US and the high commissioner to Australia.

In case of Bangladesh too, China is exercising the same caution.

For instance, China has decided to form a joint technical committee for assessing the projects proposed by Bangladesh, Kabir said.

"I would say that this visit is meant to build a relationship that is futuristic and expansive," he added.

China committed to provide about \$20 billion during Xi's visit to Dhaka in 2016 for a host of mega projects. Some of the projects are yet to be implemented. So Bangladesh did not get the full amount pledged.

"So, China wants better scrutiny this time -- Beijing would like to look at the nitty-gritty of the projects

this time," said Mahub Uz Zaman, former ambassador to China.

Xi spoke about building party-to-party relationship between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the ruling Awami League in Bangladesh. He said "good governance requires good party".

Asked what this means, Imtiaz Ahmed, executive director of the Centre for Alternatives, said: "This is Chinese approach of building relationship, which they do everywhere. Through this, they find it easier to implement their policies."

The Awami League can learn discipline and governance of the party from the CPC, said Ahmed, also a professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka.

Xi also assured Hasina of support for repatriating the more than a million Rohingya. However, analysts say how far it will work will depend on the situation in Myanmar, which is now going through a civil war.

Repatriation has not been possible in the last seven years despite several efforts including under a tripartite mechanism under Chinese leadership.

On this, Kabir said: "Chinese assurance is great and is required for the solution, but we will have to wait to see what happens in Myanmar, particularly in the Rakhine State in the days to come."

Jubo League leader, two others sued

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the CSA case are Arif Billah alias Nasim, a former senior vice-president of Mohipur thana unit of Chhatra League, and Jubo League activist Roni Hossain of Kalapara. Jubo League leader Shamim contested for the post of chairman in the recent Kalapara upazila election and was defeated.

According to the case statement, Arif and Roni following the instructions of Shamim Tuesday noon uploaded a video clip on their Facebook pages which contained offensive content. They are accused of attempting to destroy communal harmony and deteriorating law and order by spreading misinformation

on Facebook. Allegations have also been brought against the three of tarnishing the image of the state minister.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Arif said, "I don't know anything about the case. After the Kalapara upazila polls on May 29, I have been away from the area. Now I'm not involved in local politics. Yet I'm still held responsible whenever something happens in the area. I also want a proper investigation..."

This correspondent tried to contact the two other accused in the case, but they did not pick up their phones.

Over "insulting" state minister Mohibbur, Didar Uddin Ahmed,

general secretary of Kalapara municipality unit Awami League, filed a GD with Kalapara Police Station on Wednesday, while Rakibul Hasan Ferdous, a member of Rangabali Sadar union unit AL, lodged another GD with Rangabali Police Station on Thursday.

The complainants accused Arif, Roni, and other unidentified individuals of tarnishing the reputation of the state minister by spreading propaganda on social media.

OC Ali Ahmed of Kalapara Police Station could not be reached despite several attempts, while OC Helal Uddin of Rangabali Police Station refused to comment.