

Prof Yunus' statement anti-state

Says foreign minister

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud has said Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus' statement calling on the world leaders to end the violence in Bangladesh is anti-state.

"Prof Yunus has urged the global community to end violence here. Such a call means making a suggestion for intervention in the internal affairs of a country. This is anti-state. It is unfortunate. We cannot expect this. I condemn it," he said.

The minister said Prof Yunus did not condemn the attacks on state, rather he talked about the law enforcers killing people with bullets.

Hasan was speaking at a media briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday.

Prof Yunus in a statement on Monday urged the international community to stop the deadly violence in Bangladesh. The Daily Star did not run any report on the statement.

Violent clashes centring the quota

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Policemen searching the bag of a bus passenger in the capital's Matuail area on Dhaka-Chattogram highway around noon yesterday. A few buses operated on the road during the curfew hours amid tight security.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan

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women in government jobs too considering that they belong to underprivileged group.

However, the government should take a decision based on evidence if it wants to reform the quota system again in future. That means the government should analyse relevant data such as the percentage of employable workforce among the population for whom the quota is intended and the percentage of employed people among them.

On the other hand, the apex court has established the fact that only the government has the authority to decide on quotas. So, there will be no confusion about it in the future.

Firoz Mia, former additional secretary

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recruitment to grades are done under different laws and rules. This circular will not change those recruitment processes. That means, quota for female in primary school teachers' jobs and ward quota in Bangladesh Railway have not been changed by this circular. Those quotas are still in effect. However, the ministry of public administration can clarify these issues.

I think the government should consider quota for females. Women of our country are still underprivileged. So, I hope the government would keep quotas to bring them into the mainstream of our society. Under the previous quota system, there were some provisions like district- or upazila-level positions for which only candidates of that particular district or upazila could apply. The ministry should clarify if this system still exists.

In my opinion, the biggest achievement of the new quota system is a smooth and trouble-free recruitment process. The previous quota system had made the recruitment process a really complicated task.

Abul Kashem Md Mohiuddin

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Thanks to the new directive, most of those difficulties are now gone. It will help speed up the government recruitment process. On the other hand, meritorious candidates, who used to be deprived due to the previous quota system, will now have better opportunities to join the civil service. The new system will increase competition among the candidates.

Recruitment of primary schoolteachers and enforcement of ward quota for Bangladesh Railway are done under separate laws and rules. Those laws and rules cannot be nullified by a government circular. However, the government will decide, if necessary, whether the Supreme Court verdict on quota reform will also be applicable to those.

New system applicable for all grades

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establishments, including BTV centre and two Metro stations, vandalised or burned or both. Scores of vehicles also came under arson attacks.

Many non-students also took to the streets in Dhaka and elsewhere, especially in the last few days, to join the student protesters.

The sheer scale of the violence prompted the government to impose curfew and deploy armed forces across the country.

THE QUOTA DEBATE

The latest quota reform is the biggest yet since its introduction in 1972.

From 1972 to 1976, 20 percent recruitment was merit-based. It was increased to 40 percent in 1976 and continued until 1985, when it was further increased to 45 percent.

In 2012, one percent quota was introduced for persons with disability, taking merit-based recruitment to 44 percent.

Until the 2018 government decision, 44 percent government jobs were merit-based, 30 percent was reserved for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 percent for districts, 10 percent for women, five percent for ethnic minorities and one percent for persons with disability.

In October 2018, the government through a hastily issued circular cancelled the quota system in 9th-13th grades (Class-I and Class-II jobs) amid a massive quota reform movement at different universities.

The students never wanted its abolition, they only demanded that it be revised down.

Subsequently, the government circular was challenged in the High Court by seven children of freedom fighters. In response, the HC on June 5, 2024, declared the government circular illegal, essentially reinstating the 56 percent quota.

NATIONWIDE PROTEST

The HC verdict triggered a student protest on public university campuses first in Dhaka and within days in other parts of the country.

Thousands of students from private universities, colleges and in some cases from schools joined the nationwide movement.

Protests intensified after the Supreme Court on July 4 declined to issue a stay on the HC verdict, triggering a massive one-point movement for quota reform.

After three days of countrywide

demonstrations, the SC gave a status quo on the HC verdict and set August 7 for hearing. The decision did little to pacify the agitators.

The movement turned violent after alleged Chhatra League and other ruling party activists attacked the agitating students at Dhaka University and some other universities on July 15.

The attack came hours after Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said that "Chhatra League would give a fitting reply to those student leaders of the quota movement who labelled themselves as Razakars and were arrogant."

Violence escalated further after the killings of several students during their clashes with law enforcers and alleged pro-government activists, who were seen attacking the students with iron pipes, rods, sticks and hockey sticks in Dhaka and elsewhere. Some of them also opened fire on the protesters in and outside the capital.

In the wake of the situation, the government requested the top court to hold an early hearing as death toll continued to rise.

After hearing the matter for about two and a half hours on Sunday, the seven-member full bench of the Appellate Division led by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan gave the verdict, curtailing quota to only seven percent.

In disposing of the matter under article 104 of the constitution, the top court "considered the importance of the case and the prevailing overall reality."

THE PRESS BRIEFING

At the briefing held at the law minister's official residence, Anisul read out the circular, and provided its context.

Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain and State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat were present.

Asked about women quota, the law minister said female students during the movement said they are empowered enough and they do not need this quota.

"I have nothing to say if the Appellate Division listened to them," he said.

He also said the government will take care of the treatment of the general students who were injured during the movement.

"Earlier, the prime minister in her address to the nation said that she will take steps about those who have been killed and injured. We are sticking to that comment," Anisul said, replying to a question.

"We came to know they have something to say about the cases that were filed. We are trying to reach out to them [protesters] through the media. It they give us information about the cases, we will look into the matter."

He said the government will create a congenial atmosphere at educational institutions and ensure safety and security of the students.

He also claimed that "militants, BNP, Jamaat, Islami Chhatra Shibir and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal" infiltrated into the quota protest to destroy the country.

"We believe the situation will not deteriorate, as the problem has been solved. If anyone makes any ill attempt to deteriorate the situation, we will take stern actions."

About allegations that some international media ran reports using "distorted information," Arafat said a plan for carrying out violence using the students as a shield was hatched long ago.

"They had preparation to attack the data centre and disrupt internet service. Without internet, we also suffered as we could not communicate globally. As we could not communication globally, their syndicate abroad carried out a disinformation campaign. As a result, international media is providing wrong information," he said.

He claimed "BNP, Jamaat and Shibir men" attacked different government structures like BTV, data centre, toll plazas and Setu Bhaban.

"I received phone calls from BTV. They were crying, feeling threatened. They were saying, 'sir save us.'"

"When you are attacked, you have to fight back. When we fought back in defence, the clashes left many people killed and injured. The attackers are responsible for the killings. Each and every one involved in the killing will be brought to book," he said.

The education minister said students were used as a shield in the movement.

"We will assess how many students were involved in the movement and from which institutions after reopening of the educational institutions," he said.

According to court records, 799 people were produced before the CMM court in three days till Monday.

Meanwhile, Additional Commissioner of DMP's Detective Branch (DB) Harun-or-Rashid yesterday said the DB has so far arrested 150 BNP and Jamaat leaders.

At a press briefing in his office yesterday, he alleged that different wings of the BNP and a section of Jamaat-Shibir activists carried out arson attacks on the BTV Bhaban, Setu Bhaban, Data Centre, metro rail, police traffic box and police stations, upon the instructions from Tarique Rahman, acting chairman of the BNP, from London.

Harun said they arrested BNP executive committee member Tariqu Alam yesterday. According to the DB chief, Tariqu had been in contact with Tarique and used to convey his messages to other leaders.

4 organisers of quota

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for ethnic minorities and another one percent for persons with disability and people of third gender.

The new allocation is in line with Sunday's Supreme Court verdict.

Nahid said the verdict and the circular were in favour of the protesters. But the government should answer for the recent bloodshed and deaths.

"So, we demand a policy-making dialogue involving the stakeholders in a conducive environment. Besides, we urge the government to form an independent commission to avoid issues regarding the quota system in future.

"Our movement will continue until justice is ensured for the deaths and injuries."

Two other coordinators, Sarjis Alam and Hasant Abdullah, Assistant Coordinator Hasib Al Islam, and Billal Hossain, father of Asif Mahmud, an organiser who allegedly had been missing since July 19, were present at the briefing.

There were also some policemen at the briefing, while a large number of them were seen outside.

Nahid said the situation escalated as a result of "instigating speeches by different government officials, controversial activities of Jubo League and Chhatra League, and use of excessive force by the law enforcers".

Taking advantage of the anarchic situation created to foil the movement, criminals launched arson attacks on different government establishments, he added.

"It's clear that irresponsible acts by the government and oppressive policy are to blame for this anarchic situation. For this, the government is solely responsible, while the law

Carry out fair probe

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been suspended since Thursday night.

They welcomed the government decision to restore internet as a trial around 10:00pm yesterday and demanded full restoration of internet.

In future, the media should have internet services during such situations.

The closure of the internet services is disrupting the exchange and verification of information. The economy is also being affected badly.

Such closure of internet service creates a fear of information blackout, it said, adding that resumption of internet service is imperative in keeping the economy running.

The statement said several journalists lost their lives and at least 100 others were injured.

"Journalists discharging their professional duties are still in a state of insecurity. All parties have to take the responsibility to ensure safety of journalists.

"The situation turned worse as rumours, false and baseless information

7-hour curfew break

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High Court divisions of the Supreme Court, will remain suspended during the curfew hours.

The courts will resume judicial proceedings if the curfew is relaxed.

The SC administration yesterday issued three notifications in this regard detailing the instructions.

The offices and sections of the courts will remain open as usual even during the curfew.

If the government declares any general holiday, the courts will remain closed on that particular day, SC Registrar General Abdul Aziz Bhuiyan told The Daily Star citing the notifications.

Ethiopia landslides toll hits 229

REUTERS, Addis Ababa

The death toll from two landslides in southern Ethiopia has jumped to 229 and could rise further as the search for survivors and casualties continued into a second day, a government official said yesterday.

A landslide buried people in Gofa zone in Southern Ethiopia regional state on Sunday night, then a second one engulfed others who had gathered to help on Monday morning.

"I don't know when it will stop. We are still recovering bodies," Markos Melese, head of the National Disaster Response agency in Gofa Zone, told Reuters by phone. "We are still digging."

On Monday an official said at least 50 people had died and children and police officers were among the dead.

Footage shared by the local administration showed people digging up bodies with shovels and bare hands.

"The death toll surged after the people who came to rescue also got trapped," said Gofa district administrator Misikir Mitiku. "It is a very sad incident."

President Abiy Ahmed said he was deeply saddened by the terrible loss of life, and that federal officials had been deployed to reduce the impact of the disaster.

"We stand in strong solidarity with the people and Government of Ethiopia as rescue efforts continue to find the missing and assist the displaced," African Union chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat wrote on the social media platform X.

enforcement agencies failed to ensure public safety."

He added that the government was now shifting the blame to students and different political parties.

The government called for a dialogue while driving students out of campuses and shooting at protesters. "So, we had then rejected the call for dialogue."

He added that he was abducted and tortured physically and mentally for 24 hours, but did not say who abducted him.

"We don't feel safe."

"The government tried to suppress the movement through arrests, enforced disappearances, and use of excessive force."

Hasanat Abdullah said that before things got out of hand, the students urged the government to hold dialogue. "But they did not listen. The government cannot avoid responsibility for the damage."

"The internet shutdown caused a lack of coordination among the organisers." Meanwhile, three organisers Asif Mahmud, Abu Baker Majumder, and Rigat Rashid had been missing, he added.

Sarjis Alam said 300 to 400 people have been killed in the recent violence. "This loss is irreparable."

He said dialogues with the government could only be held when the safety of the protest organisers is ensured, the internet is fully restored, the curfew is withdrawn, educational institutions are reopened, and law enforcers leave the campuses.

The protesters on Friday night put forth a set of demands that include a public apology from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the resignation of Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan from the cabinet.

spread over the last few days due to the internet closure," added the statement.

The meeting was attended by Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; AK Azad, publisher of Samakal; Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo; AMM Bahauddin, editor of Dainik Inqilab; Naem Nizam, editor of Bangladesh Pratidin; Alamgir Hossain, editor of Samakal; Zafar Sobhan, editor of Dhaka Tribune; Mostafa Mamun, editor of Desh Rupantor; Md Golam Rahman, editor of Ajker Patrika; Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age; Shahriar Karim, executive editor of Sangbad; Shamsul Huq Zahid, editor of The Financial Express; Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor of Manabzamin; ASM Shahidullah Khan, publisher of New Age; Shyamal Dutta, editor of Bhorer Kagoj; Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of Bonik Barta; Altamash Kabir, editor of Sangbad; and Saiful Alam, editor of Jugantor.

According to a notification, the district judges, district and sessions judges, metropolitan sessions judges, chief judicial magistrates and chief metropolitan magistrates will fix the timing of their courts and offices after coordinating with the district magistrates and the police commissioners concerned.

They will conduct the judicial functions after informing the judges, officials and lawyers about the timing.

In Gazipur, eight factories were shut in Sreepur upazila yesterday for running operations during the curfew hours, said Assistant Commissioner (land) of Sreepur Atahar Shakil.