

## ‘I apprehended such an attack’

Says PM at Editors’ Guild event

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she had an apprehension that the BNP-Jamaat nexus might unleash destruction across the country to cripple the economy and hold back the nation from marching towards prosperity.

“...they [BNP-Jamaat] tried to prevent us from holding the election [January 7], but we held it. Then they thought the election would not be acceptable to all, but we could make it acceptable. We formed the government. But I had an apprehension that a blow like this [recent violence] would come,” she said.

Hasina was exchanging views with the editors and heads of news of different media outlets at a meeting, organised by Editors’ Guild, at her office.

The premier said the BNP-Jamaat clique had unleashed arson attacks

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Nur Jahan cries and runs after a prison bus that is taking her son Sheikh Farid, an HSC student, to jail from a court in Dhaka. She said her son was playing in Dhalpur Math when he was arrested.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## HC rejects Prof Yunus’ plea to scrap charge framing

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after holding a hearing on the petition.

Speaking to The Daily Star, petitioners’ lawyer Abdullah-Al-Mamun said his clients will move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC order.

He said the case was filed against his clients with an ulterior motive even though there was no allegation against them and they were not involved in any wrongdoing mentioned in the case.

The documents placed by the prosecution in the court did not have any prima facie evidence, he added.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told this correspondent that the HC summarily rejected the petition on the ground that the offences of misappropriation of funds and money laundering have been disclosed.

There is no legal bar to running the trial of the case against all the accused by the lower court concerned, he added.

During the hearing on the petition yesterday, counsel Abdullah-Al-Mamun told the HC that his clients did not commit any offence of money laundering or embezzlement or fraudulence in running Grameen Telecom, which was established as a non-profit and charitable organisation under section-28 of the Companies Act, 1994.

All the transactions of the organisation were done properly under the settlement agreement between the company and its workers, he argued.

Mamun said his clients have paid the money to their workers in accordance with law.

He said the case was filed against the petitioners, including Prof Yunus, in order to harass them and the allegations brought against them are completely fabricated and baseless.

The ACC officials submitted the charge sheet of the case without approval from the graft watchdog and therefore, the charge sheet and charge framing order against the petitioners is illegal. That is why the trial proceedings of the case can be scrapped, the lawyer argued.

ACC lawyer Khurshid, Attorney General AM Amin Uddin, Additional Attorney General Sk Md Morshed and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik opposed the petition, saying that there are specific allegations against the petitioners.

During the trial of the case, the lower court concerned will examine whether the allegations are true, they argued.

Prof Yunus and six others of Grameen Telecom on July 8 submitted the petition seeking an HC order to scrap the trial proceedings of the case.

On June 12, a Dhaka court framed charges against Yunus and 13 others in the case.

The 13 other accused are Grameen Telecom Managing Director Nazmul Islam, directors Ashraful Hassan, Naznin Sultana, Parvin Mahmud, M Shahjahan, Nurjahan Begum, and SM Huzzatul Islam Latifee, Grameen Telecom Sramik-Karmachari Union President Kamruzzaman, General Secretary Firoz Mahmud Hasan, and representative Mainul Islam, Jatiya Workers Federation Office Secretary Kamrul Hasan, and lawyers Zafrul Hasan Sharif and Yusuf Ali.

## Economy with deep scars limps along

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of inward remittances and payment of utility bills after a three-day general holiday announced in the wake of the unrest.

Despite the pressure, most banks were able to provide services by and large, said Selim RF Hussain, chairman of the Association of Bankers Bangladesh.

The moribund stock market nervously resumed trade at 11:00am yesterday, but the key index of Dhaka Stock Exchange sank 1.76 percent, the steepest decline in almost two years.

Retail shops in Dhaka, the main hub of trade, reopened but salespeople were disappointed by the thin presence of customers.

Alam Sheikh, a salesman at a clothing store at Nurjahan Supermarket, opposite to Dhaka College, was one of them.

“Customers seems to be afraid of the risk of violence,” he said.

Between 10:30am and 1:30pm, Alam Sheikh’s sales stood at Tk 3,000, a third of his sales revenue on a regular business day.

All these bleak data point to Bangladesh’s plunge into an economic stasis, however short-lived. Save for agricultural activity, trade, manufacturing and all other economic activities were almost suspended for a

week.

In the months to come, consumer prices may go further up. New investments will be on hold and jobs will evaporate. Bangladesh also runs the risk of losing export orders and many companies will struggle to pay their employees on time.

“This is a huge loss for Bangladesh when the country is already facing an economic crisis. The latest unrest has a significant impact on the economy,” said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, sharing his estimate that the country lost around \$1 billion a day over the last few days.

“Supply chain disruptions will fuel inflation, which is already high,” he said.

His grim prediction has a basis as annual inflation rose to 9.73 percent in fiscal 2023-24, the highest in 12 years, overshooting the government’s target of containing it to 7.5 percent.

Ahsan Mansur, a former economist at the International Monetary Fund, warned that export orders might be diverted to other countries in the wake of the recent crisis in Bangladesh.

Zahid Hussain, another noted economist, described the crisis as the nation’s double jeopardy: a real-life lockdown and a virtual lockdown.

## Bus, train services may take days to normalise

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Metro rail remained suspended and Dhaka Elevated Expressway remained closed since Thursday.

The elevated expressway will remain closed until the curfew is lifted fully, said Captain (retd) Hasib Hasan Khan, manager (operations and maintenance) of First Dhaka Elevated Expressway Company Ltd (FDEE), the operating company of the expressway.

“The expressway is operated by a consortium of foreign countries. So, the authority has decided to keep the expressway closed until the curfew is lifted fully,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the two ramps of the expressway where the toll plazas were torched would be kept closed even after lifting of the curfew.

The company is considering opening the Banani ramp where tolls will be collected manually, Hasib said. He said the company incurred a loss of around Tk 50 crore because of the torching of the two toll plazas.

The Airport-Farmgate section of the first elevated expressway was opened to traffic in September last year. Another ramp of the expressway

at the FDC gate was opened early this year, bringing much relief to the commuters.

Over 50,000 vehicles used the expressway daily and the authority used to collect Tk 40 to 45 lakh in tolls daily, Hasib said.

### DMTCL FORMS COMMITTEE

MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, yesterday said they formed a committee to evaluate when the metro rail operation could be resumed. The committee is supposed to submit its report within 10 days.

“The committee started works today [Wednesday]. We will act on the basis of its report,” he told The Daily Star.

Siddique had told this correspondent earlier that it would take at least one year to make the two metro stations operational.

### BUS SERVICES

Bus services to and from Dhaka resumed yesterday morning with a low number of passengers.

Md Kawsar, a staffer of Dola Paribahan at Sayedabad Bus Terminal, said at least eight to nine buses had left the capital for Chattogram, Sylhet, Barishal, and

Khulna till around 12:30pm. Mosharref Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said they resumed their services on all routes from 9:00am.

Khandaker Enayet Ullah, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said buses will operate only when the curfew is in pause. Railways Secretary Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star yesterday that the BR incurred a loss of around Tk 8 crore as criminals torched four carriages of a train and vandalised many coaches and other establishments of the railway.

The BR operates over 360 passenger trains daily. Alamgir Kabir, joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, said only three launches left Dhaka between 10:00am and 5:00pm yesterday.

No launch left Dhaka for Barishal and other popular destinations as vessels on those routes usually leave Dhaka at night, he said.

“But we did not allow any launches to depart Dhaka after 5:00pm as curfew came into force then,” he said.

With additional reporting from Sukanta Halder

## 787 more arrested

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27 cases were filed in Chattogram, 17 in Rajshahi, nine each in Narayanganj and Savar, eight in Natore and five in Tangail.

According to an analysis of 29 of the cases, 499 named and 74,055 unnamed people have been made accused in the cases lodged with 17 police stations on charges of attacking law enforcers and damaging and torching state properties.

The number of accused was not mentioned in 24 cases, which only stated “many unidentified accused”.

Many of the arrestees were on remand and divulging important information about the financing behind the sabotage and those who gave the directives for the violence, said Biplob Kumar Sarker, joint commissioner (operations) of DMP, at a media briefing at the DMP headquarters yesterday.

The miscreants had attacked around 69 police establishments in Dhaka and set several traffic boxes on fire, he said.

DMP in a statement said they incurred a loss of Tk 61 crore due to the violence.

The main targets of this attack were the DMP and Bangladesh Police, according to Sarker.

“The violence and sabotage that

## 2 KNF members killed in Ruma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two members of Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) were killed during a raid by a team of joint forces in the Saikatpara area of Bandarban’s Ruma upazila yesterday, said a press release of the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate.

According to the press release, the team has also recovered arms, ammunition, and other items.

The joint forces of army, BGB, Rab, police, and Ansar are conducting a drive in the area since the robberies of Sonali and Krishi banks in Ruma and Thanchi on April 2 and 3.

Earlier on July 13, five other members of the Bawm community were sent to jail yesterday on suspicion of being members of the KNF.

They were presented before a court on charges of bank robbery and arms theft that took place in Ruma.

## 25 killed in migrant wreck off Mauritania

AFP, Nouakchott

At least 25 migrants have died and dozens are missing after their boat capsized off Mauritania, the country’s news agency AMI said yesterday, in the latest in a string of migrant tragedies off the coast of West Africa.

Approximately 300 people were on the boat, said the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

took place in Dhaka over the last few days and the way the police and other government establishments were burnt cannot be a protest of the students in any way – it is the BNP-Jamaat people who have done this and diverted the student protests to a different direction,” Sarker said.

The sabotage was carried out by miscreants amid the quota reform movement, which turned into deadly clashes between the students and law enforcers. Ruling party activists allegedly joined in too.

At least 154 people were killed and several thousand were wounded, according to The Daily Star’s count.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday dismissed the government’s allegations involving BNP with subversive activities as baseless.

The party was with the movement but it does not mean that they patronised sabotage.

“[The govt] incited the violence and invited the trouble,” he said while speaking at a press conference at the BNP chairperson’s Gulshan office.

At least 2,000 opposition leaders and activists were arrested across the country following the violent student movement, Fakhrul said, while demanding immediate release of their arrested leaders and activists.

## Lifting curfew

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Awami League leadership believes that there are risks of violence on Friday, and its activists will stay alert, said party insiders. The AL will hold a rally in front of its central office on Bangabandhu Avenue at 3:00pm that day.

At yesterday’s meeting at the home ministry, reports made by deputy commissioners from across the country were discussed, said the sources.

The participants opined that the situation is satisfactory in all districts except Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Narsingdi, and areas under the capital’s two city corporations, Narayanganj City Corporation, and Gazipur City Corporation.

In other districts, primary schools may reopen in phases after the authorities evaluate Friday’s situation, said the sources.

A minister present at the meeting said, “We want to bring primary school students back to the classrooms because the new activity-based curriculum requires their presence. We are considering opening schools everywhere except those in the four districts. We will decide about secondary schools afterwards.”

Amid widespread violence, the government on July 16 announced closure of educational institutions.

## Three missing

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capital yesterday. Neither of them mentioned who took them.

Rifat wrote on Facebook that he “narrowly escaped” from being a victim of “enforced disappearance”.

He said he was picked up from Mahanagar residential area of Hatirjheel around 11:00pm on July 19. He was asked to announce a suspension of the protests. When he refused to comply, he was given an injection that made him lose consciousness.

Whenever he woke up over the last few days, he was given another injection, he wrote, adding that he was left blindfolded at the place from where he was taken.

He mentioned that his family admitted him to a hospital and he would talk to the coordinators after getting better.

The education boards later postponed the Higher Secondary Certificate and equivalent examinations scheduled for July 18, 21, 23, and 25.

After the meeting yesterday, Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury told reporters that the situation was not conducive to reopening universities.

Completing the HSC and equivalent examinations is the priority, he said.

Participants at the meeting talked about the judicial commission formed to probe the killings on 16 July during the quota-reform protests. The government would wait for the commission, led by High Court Judge Khondker Diliruzzaman, to file a report, and then take action.

“The government will bring those responsible for the killings to book, no matter who they are,” a minister told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

The participants agreed that curfew should be lifted in all places, except the aforesaid districts, unless there is an unless an untoward incident. Dusk-to-dawn curfew may remain in the four districts.

Even if daytime curfew is lifted, there will be strong surveillance on Dhaka’s Shonir Akhra, Demra, Rayerbagh, Mohammadpur, Mirpur-10, Savar and Uttara because these places witnessed fierce clashes which resulted in high number of casualties.