

Trade bodies demand quick restoration of law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trade bodies yesterday urged for quick restoration of law and order and the resumption of economic activities at the earliest.

Economic activities are hampered due to the disruption in imports, exports and the supply chain, said the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry in a statement yesterday, a day after Sheikh Hasina stepped down as the prime minister and fled Bangladesh.

"Businesses and entrepreneurs are losing heavily. Under the circumstances, the damage to the economy will be high unless quick steps are taken," it said, while calling for opening factories at the earliest.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) stressed bringing normalcy back as the economy suffered significantly since the beginning of the unrest centring on the students' quota reform movement that has so far claimed upwards of 300 lives.

Both the trade bodies called for forming the interim government lawfully as soon as possible.

"We request everyone to take necessary measures as we believe an interim government is a must to restore the democratic election process and hand the country back to its people and its elected representatives," the DCCI said.

The country's apex trade said it would extend its full cooperation to the interim government.

"The recent events have taken a large toll on our lives and economy, and unless effective measures are in place, supply chain disruptions will cause further damage and add to public suffering," the DCCI said.

A conducive environment must be in place to facilitate economic recovery, foster a stable political environment and rebuild businesses' confidence and activities at home and abroad, it said.



Members of the army clear an entrance to the Gono Bhaban a day after people stormed the prime minister's official residence following Sheikh Hasina's resignation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Uncertainty looms over HSC exams

Question papers kept in various locations damaged in violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Uncertainty has risen over holding the HSC and equivalent exams following incidents of attacks on multiple locations across the country where question papers were stored.

Confidential exam materials, including question papers, were stored in various police stations and other facilities for safekeeping. Several of those locations came under attack on Monday following the resignation and departure of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

During the attacks, question papers in many areas were burned or destroyed, according to multiple officials from the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board.

As a result, a new set of question papers needs to be prepared, which board officials indicate could take some time.

Meanwhile, a number of exam centres around the country were also damaged in similar attacks and are in urgent need of repair, reports UNB.

Hasina

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His statement came a day after Hasina's resignation and fleeing to India.

Addressing an all-party meeting at the Parliament House, Jaishankar said India was giving Hasina some time "to recover" before talking to her as she was in a state of shock, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

The Indian government would give her the necessary assistance, he said.

Several leaders including Rahul Gandhi of Congress conveyed their full cooperation to the government in this regard.

Rahul enquired about the Indian government's short term and long term strategy in dealing with diplomatic ramifications of the power shift in Dhaka, reports India Today.

In response, Jaishankar said it is a developing situation and the government is analysing it closely so that it can fine-tune its next move.

Rahul also wanted to know about the state of minorities in Bangladesh and the possibility of a "foreign hand" in the unrest.

The minister said it would be too soon to talk about external interference as it is still a developing situation.

Jaishankar told the Rajya Sabha that India remains deeply concerned until law and order is visibly restored in Bangladesh.

"We are also monitoring the situation with regard to the status of minorities."

There are reports of initiatives by various groups and organisations to ensure their protection and well being.

The minister said Indian border guards have been instructed to be exceptionally alert in view of the complex situation.

He hoped the Bangladesh government would provide the required security protection for the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and the assistant high commissions in Chattogram, Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet.

"We look forward to their normal functioning once the situation stabilises."

India is in close and continuous touch with its nationals in Bangladesh through its diplomatic missions. There are an estimated 19,000 Indian nationals in Bangladesh.

Jaishankar said that India-Bangladesh relations have been exceptionally close for many decades, adding that the concern about recent violence and instability there is shared across the political spectrum.

Since the national election in January this year, there have been considerable tensions, deep divides and growing polarisation in Bangladesh politics.

This underlying foundation aggravated a student agitation that started in June, he said.

There was growing violence, including attacks on public buildings and infrastructure, which continued through July.

On August 4, events took a very serious turn. Attacks on police and government installations intensified as overall levels of violence greatly escalated. Properties of individuals associated with the regime were torched across the country, Jaishankar said.

"What was particularly worrying was that minorities, their businesses and temples have also come under attack at multiple locations."

The full extent of the damage caused to minorities by vandalism is still not clear.

US ORDERS NON-EMERGENCY STAFF OUT OF BANGLADESH

The United States government yesterday said it had ordered non-emergency personnel to leave Bangladesh as a precaution after mass protests ousted Hasina, reports AFP.

The State Department said that all non-emergency diplomats and other personnel as well as their family members had been ordered to leave as of Monday, although the US embassy in Dhaka remains open at limited capacity.

The US had last month warned its citizens not to travel to Bangladesh, citing the risk of civil unrest, crime and terrorism.

Yunus to helm interim govt

FROM PAGE 1

According to a unanimous decision on Monday by the chiefs of the three services, politicians, and civil society representatives, the president dissolved the parliament earlier in the day without an outline for an interim government or a clear transition path.

With the dissolution of the 12th parliament, he also set off a 90-day countdown for the general elections as mandated by the constitution.

With the entire police force remaining absent and without any directives or announcements about law and order, students and volunteers took up the responsibility of directing traffic on the streets of Dhaka yesterday.

Police stations and outposts remained deserted as hundreds of them had been burnt or razed to the ground.

The power vacuum comes in the wake of Bangladesh's former prime minister Sheikh Hasina resigning on Monday and fleeing the country amid a mass uprising where hundreds of thousands began to march towards Dhaka.

Earlier in the day, Nahid, proposed Yunus as head of the interim government and said Yunus had agreed to shoulder the responsibility.

"We want to see the process rolling by the morning. We urge the president to take steps as soon as possible to form

an interim government headed by Dr Yunus," said Nahid, who came under the spotlight when he was abducted by law enforcement agencies during the height of the student protests.

Nahid was found a day later by the side of a road with bruises and clear signs of torture.

Nahid reminded everyone that no government other than the one the students proposed would be acceptable. "As we have said, no military government, or one backed by fascists, will be accepted."

Yunus, attending the Paris Olympics as a special guest, had initially been reluctant to accept the proposal but eventually gave in to repeated requests from the students.

"If the students can sacrifice so much, if the people of the country can sacrifice so much, then I also have some responsibility. Then I told the students that I would accept," a reliable source quoted him as saying.

Sheikh Hasina's government had hounded the Grameen Bank founder and microcredit pioneer for almost a decade.

Nahid said they were expecting Yunus to reach Bangladesh later today or early tomorrow.

The Election Commission remains completely in the dark, as confirmed by a top official, about the next polls.

At least 92 bodies recovered

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Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in the afternoon to celebrate the resignation of Sheikh Hasina as prime minister. At around the same time, mobs attacked several police stations and buildings.

Mobs also set fire to some police stations, leading to the deaths of several policemen. In some cases, cops were also beaten to death.

At least 12 bodies of police officers were taken to the Central Police Hospital in Rajarbagh as of 8:00pm yesterday, Rezaul Hyder, director of the hospital, told The Daily Star.

AKM Shahidur Rahman, additional inspector general of police, said they were still collecting information about how many cops died.

"Our teams are working to recover the bodies. We are yet to ascertain how many policemen are missing."

DEATHS OUTSIDE DHAKA

In Jashore, 11 more bodies were recovered yesterday from hotel Zabeer Jashore that was vandalised and set on fire by unidentified criminals on Monday afternoon.

With this, the death toll from the attack went up to 24, said AM Mamun, assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The hotel, located at the district town's Chitran Mor, is owned by Jashore district AL General Secretary Shahin Chakladar.

In Noakhali, at least seven people, including three policemen, were killed in clashes between the demonstrators and police on Monday afternoon.

The clashes broke out when the agitators attacked Sonaimuri and Chatkhil police stations, said Md Asaduzzaman, superintendent of

police in Noakhali.

Of the deceased, six died during the clash at Sonaimuri Police Station between 4:30pm and 6:30pm. Three of them are policemen.

The SP, however, could not confirm how many people were killed in the clash at Chatkhil Police Station.

According to local journalists, at least one person was shot dead at Chatkhil.

The SP claimed that at least 15 policemen from the two police stations went missing after the clashes.

In Lalmonirhat, six bodies were recovered from the home of Suman Khan, joint secretary of the district AL, after it was set alight by unidentified criminals on Monday evening.

A fire service team recovered the bodies in presence of army, said Wadud Hossain, deputy assistant director of Lalmonirhat Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Witnesses said several hundred unidentified criminals attacked, vandalised and set fire to Suman's home in Kalibari area of the district town.

In Habiganj, three people, who sustained injuries during a clash between police and demonstrators in Baniachong upazila on Monday night and early yesterday at the upazila health complex.

Besides, the body of a police sub-inspector was also recovered yesterday.

With this, the death toll from the recent violence in the upazila rose to 10, said Shamima Akhter, Baniachong upazila health and family welfare officer.

In Thakurgaon, two people, who

And it is becoming increasingly likely that the envisioned transition to an interim government will not be in strict adherence to the constitution.

Shahdeen Malik, a Supreme Court lawyer and a noted commentator on legal issues, said it might not be possible to fully abide by the constitution in the context of such an extraordinary political upheaval in Bangladesh.

"This has happened in the past. Since it is not possible to follow the constitution to make reforms for national interest, these reforms could be legitimised by amending the constitution later," he told The Daily Star.

Asif Nazrul, a Dhaka University law professor who has been vocal against Hasina's government, was alongside the protest organisers at the briefing in front of the Bangabhaban.

He spoke along the same strain as Malik. He also indicated the possibility of bypassing the constitutional requirement in the interest of political legitimacy.

"There are different constitutional means and customs to legalise certain actions. We will do that."

The law professor said that the meeting also discussed other details of the interim regime, including its duration and the number of people and so forth. But since those were not finalised, he did not divulge them.

suffered burns on Monday night, died of their injuries yesterday. They were Al Mamun, 35, and Shahan, 14, residents of Thakurgaon Road area in the district town, said locals.

A group of unruly people looted and set fire to several shops at Baliadangi intersection of the district town on Monday night. As the blaze spread, a gas cylinder caught fire and blasted, leaving six people, including Al Mamun and Shahan, injured.

Shahan died on the way to Rangpur Medical College Hospital Dhaka early yesterday while Mamun breathed his last on the way to Dhaka yesterday morning.

The rest of the injured were receiving treatment at different hospitals in Thakurgaon.

On Monday, at least 76 deaths were reported in 13 districts outside Dhaka.

In Pirojpur, agitating people vandalised and set fire to the district AL office in the district town yesterday afternoon. Houses of several AL leaders were also torched.

In Pabna, criminals yesterday attacked the houses and businesses of several AL leaders, including Md Mintu, director of Pabna Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) yesterday urged the people not to get involved in violence, looting, and destruction during their victory celebrations.

The civil society platform also urged all not to take the law into their own hands, and to resist any initiative of carrying out killing and destroying state and personal properties.

Shujan called for protecting different religious centres, including temples.

Additionally, there have been incidents of looting and vandalism at multiple television and media organisations.

"To prevent these unwanted incidents, the president must immediately take necessary actions," the statement reads.

Khaleda Zia freed

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issued yesterday, President Mohammed Shahabuddin, exercising his power under Article 49 of the constitution, granted Khaleda Zia clemency in two cases based on the law ministry's recommendation and ordered her release.

The development came after the president and chiefs of armed forces agreed to on the decision during a meeting at the Bangabhaban on Monday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told reporters.

Khaleda Zia on February 8, 2018, was sent to the Old Dhaka Jail after a special court in Dhaka sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The High Court later doubled her five-year jail term.

In the same year, the same special court in Dhaka sentenced Khaleda to seven years in jail in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government temporarily freed Khaleda from jail through an executive order suspending her sentence on March 25, 2020, with the condition that she stay in her Gulshan house and not leave the country.

She has long been battling various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and issues related to the kidneys, lungs, heart, and eyes.

Although the government has extended the period of her conditional release on multiple occasions, it has denied BNP's every call to take her abroad for advanced treatment.

'SHE GOT EMOTIONAL' Khaleda Zia learnt about the news of Hasina's departure from television

Rights bodies voice

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and journalists.

It specifically mentioned attacks on Hindu temples and the failure of law enforcement agencies, fire service, and civil defense to provide adequate assistance.

They demanded vigilance to prevent such incidents and appropriate compensation for victims.

Transparency International Bangladesh expressed profound disappointment and strongly condemned incidents of violence across districts, including attacks on homes, temples, and business establishments belonging to religious minorities.

Condemning the arson and looting of important state establishments and vehicles, TIB in a statement called on all responsible authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the security of religious minorities and state assets.

Such self-interest and criminal activities can derail and cast doubts on the opportunity to rebuild the nation with equality, justice, and good governance, which was achieved through the unprecedented loss of lives and sacrifice of students and citizens, it said.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "It is extremely disheartening and disappointing that we have to demand protection of religious minorities and state assets."

"We sincerely urge all the responsible groups to fulfill their essential responsibilities in ensuring that the opportunity to rebuild our country brought by the sacrifice of students and citizens don't go to the hands of communal forces and narrow interests."

Mentioning the recent violence and attacks on various establishments, including the parliament building, Iftekharuzzaman said, "All state assets are built on the hard earned money and taxes of people."

and her doctors. "Initially, she got very emotional but later smiled," a member of BNP's media cell said.

"It's not right to oppress the people. Sheikh Hasina is proof of the consequences of wrongdoings. Allah has judged her," Khaleda was quoted as saying by hospital staff.

Khaleda was kept informed about the country's situation when the quota reform protest started last month by her doctors.

"Khaleda Zia was aware that the country's situation was deteriorating day by day. But she was very surprised to learn that Hasina was forced to resign and flee the country," a top BNP leader said.

BNP Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas said, "Hasina caused great harm to Madam's life."

Asked about her health condition, he said, "Madam is very ill and cannot even speak properly. If she could be sent abroad for better treatment, it would be very good for her health. We are now considering it."

"We are hoping that Madam will return to the political field again."

Another BNP leader Selima Rahman told The Daily Star that Khaleda Zia was imprisoned "in false cases and out of vindictiveness."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told reporters, "Whenever she [Khaleda] feels fit and healthy, she will appear in public."

Following her release, BNP supporters celebrated outside the Nayapaltan party office, chanting slogans in her name.

Khaleda might address the public the day she returns to her residence from the hospital, said two standing committee members.

"To avert such self-destructive activities, it is imperative that all responsible people, in addition to the general public, take an active role."

TIB urged the army chief and other responsible stakeholders to uphold their commitment to maintain law and order.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) also condemned the incidents and called for the protection of state and private properties, as well as religious institutions.

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar, said, "Yesterday [Monday], we achieved an unprecedented and unimaginable victory, considered by many as our second independence. This victory opens new possibilities to rebuild the state and construct a democratic, non-communal, developed, and livable nation."

"However, if we fail to act responsibly, this potential may be lost. We observed some undesirable incidents during the celebrations. We condemn the attacks and vandalism and urge everyone to refrain from such activities."

Rights body, Ain o Salish Kendra, condemned the incidents of vandalism, particularly targeting religious minority communities.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad also urged authorities to take immediate action to prevent

attacks, arson, looting, and vandalism.

Meanwhile, the Left Democratic Alliance, Anti-Fascist Left Front, and Bangladesh Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal urged citizens to ensure the safety of life and property, particularly of those from religious and ethnic minorities.

At a rally in Paltan, they warned that during this time, corrupt individuals and looters might take advantage to burn their corruption files at offices. The public must stay vigilant and stand against them.