

What good is fame, if I can't speak for the people: Badhan



Badhan walked from Mirpur 11/5 to Banani, reaching around 1:30pm. Upon learning that Sheikh Hasina had fled, I discarded my burka and hijab, wrapped myself in the Bangladeshi flag, and joined my friends in Banani, Kamal Ataturk," she shared.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

"The state that fires upon innocent civilians and issues arbitrary orders for mass arrests cannot truly embody democracy," her voice trembled as she spoke through the megaphone.

"My daughter might have been among those children killed in the protests; I could have been among those harmed. This government has failed to protect us and must be held accountable. If I take to the streets to assert my rights, no one should use violence against me. I demand my rights. I have no passport to another land; this country is my home. I refuse to live under oppression, and I will not let my children grow up in such a hostile environment. This country is ours, and together we will bring about change," declared Azmeri Haque Badhan as the artists rallied in demand for justice on August 1.

As the rain soaked her through, cascading like tears from a grieving sky, it did nothing to dampen the searing fury and sorrow that burned deeply in her heart on that day. Adorned in a black salwar kameez with a bright red scarf draped around her neck, her eyes blazed with fierce determination as she denounced the horrific acts sanctioned by the tyrannical regime.

During the protest, many netizens criticised the silence of celebrities. Badhan, tormented by depression, simply couldn't comprehend

expressing herself by penning her emotions that time. Yet, the tragic losses of Abu Sayed and Riya Gope profoundly shook her, causing her to overcome her fear and break free from the shackles of oppression.

"Abu Sayed's and Riya Gope's deaths devastated me. Amid the protests, my daughter and father would often loiter around the terrace while we were confined indoors. The helicopters' fires could have claimed their lives, or I might have been the mother who perished at the window. The thought broke my heart, leaving me unable to write or speak during those times," she revealed.

"On July 25, I changed my profile and cover photos to black, replacing a previous image with former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Many warned me that this act and using a VPN might lead to arrest. On July 26, I posted: 'The accountability system of our democratic country has been shattered. As a Bangladeshi citizen, I am devastated, traumatised, and unsafe.' Despite threats of arrest under the Digital Security Act (DSA), I was determined to speak out," she said.

On July 27, director Akram Khan urged artists on a WhatsApp group which consisted of 900 people, to support the student protests. While younger actors were eager, many seniors hesitated, fearing arrest if they supported the nine-point demand. The platform, titled "Drissho

Madhyam Shilpi Shomaj" (Visual Artists' Society), decided to protest in front of Sangsad Bhaban.

"When we arrived at Kamarbari, the police forbade us from protesting at the Sangsad Bhaban without permission. When Mamunur Rashid bhai arrived, the DC preferred to negotiate with him, thinking he might be more pliable, but we pressed on and successfully held our procession at Farmgate. Despite being barred from displaying placards and banners, I was supported by Rajib bhaiya, Piplu bhai, Dhruvo

hijab, wrapped myself in the Bangladeshi flag, and joined my friends in Banani, Kamal Ataturk," she shared.

On that very day, widespread looting and vandalism targeted Hindu homes and temples. Indian media, however, falsely portrayed the situation as "mass genocide" and "widespread rape of Hindu women" linked to the student protests.

To counter these false claims, Badhan spoke with Kolkata's media to explain the truth. Despite her efforts, manipulated videos of her circulated on X, falsely alleging that Hindu women were being coerced to convert to Islam or leave the country. In response, she posted:

"I must address the blatant lies and propaganda spread by Indian media and far-right groups about Bangladesh. As a proud Bangladeshi, I'm sharing my video from a recent protest where I advocated for student rights and condemned the Hasina regime. Yet, Indian media continues to distort the truth, spreading falsehoods and escalating tensions by manipulating videos like mine."

"In the past few days, I've done my best to present my perspective, talking with various Kolkata-based channels. Despite this, they continue pushing a narrative involving the former PM and her son, likely for political reasons that I'm unaware of. My Indian friends in Kolkata frequently check on me for updates, and Tabu ji has also expressed concern for my safety. I've tried to clarify the situation from my viewpoint," the actress stated.

Regarding the new interim government, Badhan is hopeful for significant reforms, particularly the scrapping of the DSA, which the former PM used to harass journalists, actors, directors, and cartoonists. "The torture Nawshaba faced in 2018 was unjust and horrible. They tried to control artists by threatening them with similar treatment. I deeply regret the injustice Nawshaba suffered; she was blacklisted and even denied housing. As an artiste, I strongly condemn such acts," affirmed the *Khufiya* actress.

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bhai, Akram bhai, Monem bhai, and Lima apa.

On August 3, students consolidated their demands to a single point: the resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

"I received numerous threats, one even threatening to throw acid on my face. When the police tried to block students in Shahbagh, I intervened, standing in their way and insisting that the protest continue. The strict curfew on August 4 deeply distressed me, fearing that the former PM might not resign despite the danger. My family was anxious and begged me to stay home on August 5, but I promised to attend the march disguised in a burka," said the *Esha Murder* famed actress.

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Dhaka to decide whether to seek

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"That creates an embarrassing situation for the Indian government," he said, adding India "knows this and I am sure they will take care of it". He did not elaborate.

India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment.

Hasina fled the country for India on Aug 5 after a violent uprising against her led to nearly 300 people getting killed, including many students. She has been named in two murder cases already, along with senior members of her cabinet.

Ataur Rahman, deputy director of the investigation cell of International Crimes Tribunal, a domestic court, said it had launched a third case - an investigation against ten people, including Hasina, for murder, torture and genocide during the period of the protests.

At least three of Hasina's former ministers and advisers have already been arrested in Bangladesh.

In her only statement since her ouster, Hasina has demanded a probe into the killings and vandalism during the protests. She has not commented

on the charges against her.

Hossain, a retired diplomat, is the adviser on foreign affairs in the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, which was sworn in last week after Hasina's ouster. The council of advisers includes other retired officials, lawyers, student leaders of the protests and some opposition politicians.

In his first interview to international media since taking over, Hossain said Yunus is "very unhappy about the way the statements are coming from India, from the former prime minister" and he conveyed this to the Indian envoy in a meeting on Wednesday.

He added that Dhaka wants good ties with everyone, including India, China and the US.

Discussing possible elections in Bangladesh, the adviser said that there will be more clarity on the timeline by September.

"Because everyone, all my colleagues in the council of advisers, they are extremely busy with bringing back normalcy" which should be restored by early September, he said.

He said the interim's government priority is to bring "irreversible" reforms, "because our system has been thoroughly corrupted and the institutions have been destroyed and they have to be restored."

Once elections are announced, he said, "we fade away", referring to senior members of the interim government.

"None of us have any political ambitions."

ROHINGYA REFUGEES
Hossain also asked India, and other countries, to take in more Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, as Bangladesh was not in a position to accept any more.

Hossain said other countries need to put pressure on the Arakan Army rebel group in Myanmar to "ensure this does not happen", referring to attacks on Rohingyas in their native Rakhine state.

"The world community has to create a situation that they (the Rohingyas) can go back," he said.

"It is a humanitarian issue that involves the entire world, not only Bangladesh. We have done more than our share," Hossain said.

US in touch with India

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"On the topic of Bangladesh, we have been in touch with our Indian partners as well as other countries in the region to discuss recent events," Patel said.

"Our push for an end to violence in Bangladesh as well as for accountability and the respect for rule of law is on," he said.

Asked about the two letters sent by two Indian American congressmen - Raja Krishnamoorthi and Shri Thanedar - to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken seeking his intervention in protecting the lives of Hindus in Bangladesh, he said he is aware of them.

"I'm not going to get into specific letters or engagements... We welcome Dr Yunus's call for calm and an end to the violence... We welcome the new government's focus on restoring security and the protection of members of minority communities as well," he added.

Will back new govt as long as it stands

FROM PAGE 16
"They [the conspirators] should be dismissed from their duties. Those identified as terrorists who have acted in favour of the last government must be arrested and brought to book," he added.

About the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Fakhru said, "Hasina crossed the line. What arrogance she had! She had to flee back to the place where her roots belong."

"I am telling the Awami League, there is still time; stop stirring up trouble. If you continue like this, you won't survive," he added.

Fakhru also criticised the attempt by AL leaders to lay flowers

at the Dhanmondi-32 residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Even today, you went to Dhanmondi-32 to lay flowers. No one objected, but the students didn't let it happen because no one wants to see that person anymore. People no longer want to see Hasina's face."

Fakhru said, "Using the minority community as a shield, the Awami League is trying to create instability..."

"Their main goal is to create instability within the country, hoping that if they can secure India's help again, they might be saved."

Fakhru urged the AL party leader

and activists to surrender.

"For your own good, stop causing trouble and surrender. Those of you still outside, hiding here and there, take a look at what happened yesterday. See how the [former] law minister and [former] advisor to [the prime minister] were taken to court," he added.

Demanding that those responsible for human rights violations be brought to justice, he said, "These people must be tried under international laws for crimes against humanity."

BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas, Selima Rahman, and other leaders also spoke at the event.

Ex-home boss faces ACC probe

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Public Relations Officer Akhtarul Islam said a five-member investigation committee was formed yesterday, led by Jahangir Alam, deputy director of the ACC, to investigate the allegations.

According to the complaint, Asaduzzaman Khan and his associates ran a syndicate that used to take bribes. After assuming responsibility of the ministry, he allegedly took bags full of money as bribes. These funds were collected

from the police, the Department of Narcotics Control, and the Fire Service.

It says then Harun-ur-Rashid Biswas, additional secretary, led the syndicate. Other members of the syndicate included Joint Secretary Dhananjay Kumar Das, the minister's Assistant Personal Secretary (APS) Monir Hossain, Public Relations Officer Sharif Mahmud Apu, and Administrative Officer Molla Ibrahim Hossain.

Harun played a key role in

collecting or withdrawing the money. It is alleged that the Kamal-Harun syndicate embezzled thousands of crores of taka and sent the money abroad, it added.

There are also allegations that the syndicate took bribes for appointments to key positions. A list of candidates used to be sent from the minister's office to respective departments under the home ministry after recruitment circulars, according to the allegations.

Palak, Tuku

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Magistrate Md Rashidul Alam passed the order after investigation officer Mohammad Yusuf, a sub-inspector of Paltan Model Police Station, produced them before the court with a 10-day remand appeal, said a court staffer.

In the remand application, investigator Yusuf said involvement of the accused in the incident was primarily found. Moreover, as per their directives, the other accused committed such offences.

He said the three need to be questioned in remand to find out where the other accused are.

The defence lawyers sought bail along with cancellation of the remand appeal.

In the courtroom, pro-BNP Jamaat lawyers chanted slogans demanding their execution.

Army, BGB, and additional police personnel were deployed on the court premises.

On Wednesday, police arrested Tuku, Palak, and Shaikat from the capital's Nikunja residential area in Khilkhet.

A day after the killing on July 20, the victim's wife Fatema Khatun, 36, lodged the case with Paltan Model Police Station against unidentified assailants.

Kamal, 39, was a resident of Shantinagar.

According to the case statement, Fatema came to know around 7:30pm on July 19 that her husband, who was waiting for passengers near the VIP Road intersection in Paltan, was hit by bullets and lying on the street.

Fatema and her daughter took Kamal to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, but doctors declared him dead around 7:55pm, said the statement.

Fatema later went to the spot and learnt from locals that quota reform protesters gathered at VIP Road intersection on July 19.

At one stage, miscreants opened fire at police personnel and the cops fired shots in the air. As the two sides chased and counter-chased, her husband was hit and he fell on the street, Fatema said in the complaint.

Salman used clout to help

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Salman had recommended loans for GJSP from the state-run bank at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. He wrote a letter to the chairman of Janata Bank on August 9, 2020, recommending Tk 250 crore loans as working capital for GJSP.

GJSP is a Bangladeshi conglomerate whose business interests range from construction to engineering, electrical cables, information technology, printing and media.

In the letter, Salman wrote that GJSP was forced to take loans because of the adverse effects of "dishonest political actions".

The loans were not enough to meet GJSP's requirements, a fact that caused the company to default in 2018, he said.

However, the loans were regularised with a low-interest incentive package provided by the government amid the pandemic, according to the letter.

Salman warned that GJSP would

collapse if it failed to run its business in full swing because of a lack of funds. Janata Bank then approved the loans, documents show.

The board of directors of the bank was always positive about some influential clients, including Salman, against whom it had not taken any brave move, officials said.

Contacted for comment yesterday, its Chairman SM Mahfuzur Rahman claimed Salman's letter had not influenced the board's decision to approve loans for GJSP.

The board receives thousands of such recommendations for credit but its decisions are not based on these, Mahfuzur told The Daily Star.

Zereen Altaf, chief executive officer of Globe Janakantha Shilpa Paribar, said she did not have any information on Salman's recommendation for the loans.

As Salman is in police custody, The Daily Star contacted Beximco Group which declined the newspaper's request for comment.

UK, Singapore

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will be crucial in navigating the multiple challenges faced by the nation."

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong also congratulated Yunus in a letter yesterday.

"In this period of transition, your interim government has resolutely undertaken the crucial task of restoring stability," he wrote.

Wong said he is confident that under the leadership of Yunus, Bangladesh will return to a path of peace and prosperity, where all communities co-exist harmoniously.

He wished every success of the government.

Wong said Singapore and Bangladesh enjoy a "warm and longstanding" friendship that spans a wide range of sectors, including trade and investment, labour, renewable energy, infrastructure, and port management.

"I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the close ties between our countries."