

'KOLKATA RAPE' Female students protest at DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

Female students from several universities in Bangladesh staged a protest yesterday at Dhaka University, demanding justice for the rape and murder of a 31-year-old doctor in Kolkata, India.

The rally, titled "Awaj Tolo Nari" (Raise Your Voice, Women), saw participants calling for the exemplary punishment for the culprits.

Protesters held placards with messages such as "How Old Were You?", "Hang the Rapists," "Am I Next?", "Stop Violence," and "Don't Be an Alpha Male, Question What It Represents."

"This society focuses on exposing the victim's identity while shielding the rapist or harasser. We see this even in our media. Some people blame incidents of rape on women's clothing. We've

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

People from all walks of life light candles in front of Raju sculpture at Dhaka University yesterday, demanding justice for the rape and murder of a 31-year-old doctor in Kolkata, India. They also called for a proper investigation into all previous rape cases in Bangladesh.

Safety, equal rights for all Demands Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The previous government's inaction regarding past incidents of violence against minority communities has encouraged communal extremist groups to continue their attacks and oppression on minorities, said the Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation.

The foundation also demanded the protection and equal rights be ensured for all, regardless of religion or ethnicity. In a press statement, they also condemned the recent violence and oppression against minorities across the country.

The statement said during the anti-discrimination student movement, students and the public spoke for the establishment of a non-communal, democratic state and society by eliminating discrimination.

However, after Sheikh Hasina's resignation, a certain group of people expressed their accumulated anger by attacking, vandalising, and setting fire to government and private establishments, as well as the homes and properties of many leaders of the then ruling party, including ministers and MPs.

Additionally, there were at least 205 incidents of attacks on the homes and religious sites of Hindu minorities in 52 districts, posing a threat to the security of minorities.

The Foundation expressed condemnation and outrage against these incidents, according to the statement.

They said during any political transition, religious and ethnic minorities are often the victims of attacks. Minorities flee their homes in the face of such violence, and some even leave the country.

Although it did not happen this time,

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CONTROL OF DHAKA SLUMS, FOOTPATHS Out goes AL, in comes 'BNP-linked' group

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

With a shift in political landscape, new groups are vying for control at some slums and footpaths in Dhaka.

These new groups, claiming allegiance to the BNP, are attempting to assert dominance over areas previously controlled by the Awami League. Their targets include shanties, shops, and AL-affiliated clubs and offices in the slums.

However, in some areas, the grabbers have pulled back after warnings from BNP high-ups and the government.

In many places, citizen groups, including students, have become active in thwarting extortionists.

area, a new group has taken over several hundred shanties and shops that were previously controlled by pro-AL men.

They also vandalised some shanties and shops, looting valuables, locals said.

A local AL leader from Karail slum's Bou Bazar unit said he is a wholesale trader with a shop there but is currently in hiding.

"I heard they tried to break the locks of my shop but were unsuccessful. I engaged in politics to protect my business from extortion, but now I fear it might be looted any time," he said.

Another trader, who was previously associated with the AL Bou Bazar unit, said that pro-BNP men are now threatening him to leave the slum.



Controlling the slums is crucial because these areas are often used by political parties to mobilise crowds for rallies and processions in exchange for money. Besides, AL syndicates made crores of taka by operating in the slums.

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Besides, AL syndicates made crores of taka by operating in the slums, illegally supplying gas and electricity to residents with the help of corrupt city utility staff.

The Daily Star visited five slums in the capital and found that in most cases, the new groups are targeting the shanties and shops that were previously under the control of the then ruling party.

In Karail slum, the largest slum in Bangladesh located in the capital's Banani

"I took a loan of Tk 16 lakh and built 10 shanties in the slum recently. About 10 years ago, I was involved with the Awami League. Because of this, they are now threatening my family to leave the shanties immediately," he said while in hiding.

A slum dweller said while the new group has been taking over shanties, offices, and shops primarily used by AL-affiliated men, the general public has not yet been targeted.

In Sattola slum in Mohakhali, this correspondent found that pro-BNP men had taken control of the area by driving out members of pro-AL units.

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Four more injured in Aug 5 clashes die in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people who were shot and burnt during clashes in the mass protests on August 5 have died over the past two days.

The deceased are -- Abul Kalam, 55, a lawyer from Cumilla Sadar upazila; Ujjal Hossain, 30, a mason from Chuadanga; Md Asif, 26, a shop employee in Noakhali and Al Amin Hossain, 27, a pharmaceutical sales representative from Barguna.

After completing autopsies, the bodies were handed over to their families yesterday.

Among them, Abul Kalam lived on Women's College Road in Cumilla.

According to the report filed by Akib Noor, a sub-inspector of Dhanmondi Police Station, Kalam participated in a one-point demand protest for the government's resignation on August 5.

He was allegedly attacked and shot by ward councillor Raihan and his group near Cumilla High School, adjacent to Cumilla Sadar Police Station.

He was taken to a local hospital that day and later transferred to Dhanmondi Popular Hospital in Dhaka on August 6. He passed away around 7:30pm on Thursday.

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India needs to move on from one person, rebuild ties

Says analyst M Humayun Kabir

PORIMOL PALMA

New Delhi needs to avoid stereotypes about Bangladesh and rebuild relationships with other political parties and people, instead of focusing on one person and party, said international relations analyst M Humayun Kabir.

It is also time for Dhaka to present ground realities regarding the students' movement and the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina's fall, and take initiatives to address Delhi's concerns, he said.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star recently, Kabir shared the challenges of relationships with India and other foreign governments, along with the way forward in the aftermath of Hasina taking refuge in India following the mass upsurge on August 5.

"A few dimensions are emerging following Hasina's fall. First, India is feeling a sense of loss. In the last 15 years, India enjoyed various strategic benefits and the relationship with Bangladesh deepened. Now there appears to be a pause in it," said Kabir, former ambassador to the US and now president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

"There is a sense within Indian society that the movement that ousted Hasina was initiated by BNP-Jamaat, which is not right," he said.



A few dimensions are emerging following Hasina's fall. First, India is feeling a sense of loss. In the last 15 years, India enjoyed various strategic benefits and the relationship with Bangladesh deepened. Now there appears to be a pause in it.

"Second, they are trying to discover a foreign hand in the movement in Bangladesh, indicating Pakistan and China. Practically, none of them existed," he also said.

"Third, India is concerned over the attacks on minorities, mainly Hindu community, and thinks the right-wing groups are behind them. However, it is mainly the miscreants that are conducting the attacks," Kabir added.

"These are our concerns as well. The fact that students, citizens, and political and religious leaders have taken the initiative to ensure the protection of minority communities does not have much appreciation in India," he continued.

The interim government needs to take serious measures to stop any violence against minorities, engage the Indian government and society and present the facts, the expert said.

On anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh, Kabir said, "When it comes to bilateral relationships, there are two layers -- government to government and people to people. However, the relationship with Bangladesh became mostly government-to-government due to India's role in the last three elections of Bangladesh, which created a major gap in people-to-people relations."

"Now, there is an opportunity for India to fill up this gap. If we get a sensible response from them and if they positively support our transition to democracy, then I think the loss will be recovered," Kabir said.

"India has a challenge regarding what it will do with Hasina, who fled after massive killings. India should consider this aspect," he said.

"Otherwise, India cannot recover the lost ground, because when they are focused on a person, it sends the wrong signal to Bangladeshi people," Kabir said.

"My gut feeling is that India prefers Hasina to go to another country."

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Need to be vigilant against 'neo-fascism'

Says Fakhru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday called on party leaders and activists to stay vigilant to prevent "neo-fascism" from coming to power.

"We have defeated one fascism. We need to be vigilant so that neo-fascism does not come," Fakhru said at the BNP's central office in Nayapaltan during an event marking party Chairperson Khaleda Zia's birthday.

"...This struggle must continue. Otherwise, we will face a lot of danger," said Fakhru.

He said, "There might be a new conspiracy starting again to deprive people of their right to vote, and whether a new form of fascism is emerging... we need to remain vigilant about this."

"We have to keep in mind that this government is still a new government, an interim one... Its responsibility is to hold an election," Fakhru said.

"We have fought a long battle... If you

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Two friends enjoy a bike ride on a rainy afternoon on Dhaka University campus yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Yunus should be head of state'

Farhad Mazhar tells discussion; questions validity of constitution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poet and writer Farhad Mazhar yesterday called for the removal of President Mohammed Shahabuddin and proposed that Prof Muhammad Yunus be declared the head of state.

He said the mandate for Yunus comes from the students and citizens who led the mass upsurge, which toppled Sheikh Hasina.

He was speaking at a views exchange meeting at Dhaka Reporters Unity, organised by Rastrachinta.

He said instead of focusing on the constitution, there is a need for a "people's framework" rooted in the spirit of the mass upsurge to lead the country.

He said colonial powers required constitutions to control their subjects.

Mazhar accused the ousted prime minister of allowing torture camps, such as Aynagar, along with enforced disappearances and murders, to operate under the guise of constitutional legitimacy.

He underscored the need to protect the gains of the mass movement, suggesting that if Dr Yunus were to assume office [of president], he could align the country's

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