

Abdul Hafiz appointed Yunus' spl assistant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdul Hafiz, a retired lieutenant general of the Bangladesh Army, has been appointed as the special assistant to Prof Muhammad Yunus, the chief adviser of the interim government.

Hafiz will get the status of an adviser and will assist the chief adviser regarding defence and improving national unity.



The chief adviser's press wing announced his appointment in a statement issued yesterday afternoon.

Prof Yunus-led interim government was sworn in on August 8, four days after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government amid an uprising led by students and people. The interim governments have 21 advisers, including Yunus.

Abdul Hafiz was commissioned in the Bangladesh Army in the infantry corps on May 8, 1977. He served as the chief of general staff. He also served as the force commander of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and the force commander of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for two terms.

He got his Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree from Dhaka University in 1981 and holds a Master's in Defence Studies (MDS) from National University.



At least 3.5 lakh people have been marooned in Feni's three upazilas -- Fulgazi, Parshuram, and Chagalnaiya. Nearly 95 percent of the areas in these three upazilas have been submerged. Affected residents say they have never seen such intense flooding in the region. Road links have been snapped, the power is down, and mobile networks are disrupted in almost all areas.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

MYANMAR CONFLICT UN fears repeat of 2017 atrocities against Rohingyas

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday it fears a repeat of the 2017 atrocities committed against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, warning a human tragedy was unfolding in Rakhine State.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk voiced grave alarm about the sharply deteriorating situation across Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine where, he said, hundreds of civilians have reportedly been killed while trying to flee fighting.

Clashes have rocked Rakhine since the rebel Arakan Army attacked forces of Myanmar's ruling junta in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a military coup in 2021.

The AA says it is fighting for more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine population in the state, which is also home to around 600,000 members of the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fled Rakhine in 2017 during a crackdown by the military that is now the subject of a United Nations genocide court case.

"Thousands of Rohingyas have been forced to flee on foot, with the Arakan Army herding them repeatedly into locations that offer scant safe haven," Turk said in a statement.

"As the border crossings to Bangladesh remain closed, members of the Rohingya community are finding themselves trapped between the military and its allies and the Arakan Army, with no path to safety."

Support pours in for flood victims

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are collecting funds and sending relief materials to the affected areas.

The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, the platform that spearheaded the recent uprising, has beefed up its collection and rescue efforts for the flood-hit people. It yesterday launched a programme called "mass relief collection" at TSC.

"There's a line of vehicles at TSC, each filled with relief materials collected on personal initiatives. There are so many people coming to donate that the volunteers are struggling to deal with the volume of donations," Samiul Haque Sami, a Dhaka University student, wrote on Facebook, along with a photo of the crowd.

People who have logistics also come forward for the aid of the affected.

"If anyone needs a boat, please inform me. You don't need to give any money. Location: Bibirhat, Fatikchhari," wrote Shammi Hasan, on her Facebook post.

Various religious organisations, including Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian, are contributing to the relief efforts.

"This is why I still believe and hope that our country remains secular as it is. I say this country belongs to everyone -- people of all beliefs and non-beliefs, rich and poor," Najmul Alam wrote in his Facebook post.

On its Facebook page, As-Sunnah Foundation, a humanitarian organisation, shared a photo of people gathering in front of the organisation to join relief work as volunteers.

"Our initial target was to distribute 500 tonnes of relief materials, which have now been extended to 700 tonnes. Initially, we provided relief to each of 20,000 families, including 2kg of date, 2kg of flattened rice, 1kg of salt, 1kg of sugar, water, and candles.

"In the second phase, we are providing 10kg of rice, 2 litres of oil, 2kg of lentil, and 1kg of salt to each family. These will be loaded onto trucks and sent to Feni, Cumilla, and other flood-affected areas, and this effort will continue," said the foundation, adding

that many are contributing to its relief fund.

Volunteers of Bidyandono Foundation, a non profit organisation working for social welfare, have also come in support to rescue and provide relief to the flood-hit people.

U Sara Bikkhu shared a post on his Facebook that cooked food is being distributed by Mihinda Mahathero, principal of Aparajita Buddha Bihar, among the flood-affected people at Madhubazar in Khagrachhari Sadar upazila.

Charu Haque, an activist of Rashtrochinta, a political platform, shared a video on Facebook showing a beggar donating Tk 10 to the relief fund.

In a Facebook post, Caregiver Volunteers Forum at Dhaka University, said it needs funds, relief materials such as dry food, baby food, medicine, oral saline, fresh drinking water, water purification tablets, candles, life jackets, and sanitary pads.

Tasrif Khan, a singer who went to Feni as a volunteer, in his Facebook post said, "Please bring as much relief and fresh water as you can. Boats are available, and people are going out for rescue operations ... Trust me, people here are in dire need of fresh drinking water and relief supplies."

Prothom Alo Trust has sought emergency financial aid to support those affected by the floods.

On its Facebook page, Prothom Alo Bondhushava said they are distributing 10 tonnes of food items to 1,100 families.

Many artists and sports celebrities also urged people to extend their support to the flood victims.

"Our only slogan is: People are for people," ace cricketer Tamim Iqbal wrote in his Facebook post yesterday, urging all to help the flood victims.

The interim government has welcomed the people's eagerness to extend their assistance and cooperation and said the interested can contribute by sending money to the bank account of "Chief Adviser's Relief and Welfare Fund".

Hasina used DGFI

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two started as he took some initiatives to prevent the lower courts from granting bail to notorious smugglers and corrupt persons after being appointed the 21st chief justice of the country in January 2015.

The conflict reached its peak as Justice Sinha ordered the law ministry to make the disciplinary rules for lower court judges keeping powers in the hands of the Supreme Court instead of the executive and declined to deliver judgement in the 16th amendment (SC judges' removal) case in favour of the government in July 2017.

"My last days in Bangladesh were very appalling, which cannot be expressed in words. Because it is a question of realisation. I, as a sitting chief justice, had been kept under house arrest. I was not allowed to communicate with anybody. My internet connections were disconnected. Nobody was allowed to meet me. Security forces [intelligence] would stand guard around my home. One of my staffers was beaten up while he was entering my house. Saiful Abedin, the then chief of DGFI, used to disturb me at midnight and put pressure on me to resign and leave the country."

He said his colleagues (judges) of the Appellate Division of the SC, being influenced by the government, refused to sit with him in the court and told him that the High Court judges would not cooperate with him, putting him under tremendous mental pressure.

"I had then thought I have no right to stay in the country." On July 3, 2017, the SC bench led by then chief justice Sinha delivered the verdict and scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution. It means the parliament lost its powers to remove the SC judges for incapacity or misconduct. The Supreme Judicial Council, a body of the chief justice and two senior-most judges of the Appellate Division, got back the jurisdiction.

Justice Sinha said he was called to the Bangabhaban the previous night (July 2) for a meeting with then president Abdul Hamid, premier Hasina, law minister Anisul Huq, now in police custody, and attorney general Mahubey Alam (now dead).

He said that at the meeting, Hasina asked him to deliver the verdict the following day (July 3) in favour of the government, but he declined for the sake of independence of the judiciary.

"I could figure that the prime minister perhaps convinced the other judges of the apex court bench to deliver judgement in favour of the government. At one stage, the arguments with the prime minister heated up and I told her that I would resign right away. At that, she requested me not to resign and said the people would take it very badly if I resigned. She told me to go ahead as I wished."

Justice Sinha said that after all the seven judges of the Appellate Division unanimously delivered the verdict scrapping the 16th amendment on July 3, 2017, the ruling party members of parliament, including Hasina, blasted him for over five hours.

"Then I thought the government might not allow me to stay in the country. I hurriedly completed other relevant proceedings [including releasing the full text of the verdict]. I went to Japan to join a conference of the chief justices of the Asia Pacific countries. After getting out of the conference room, I got a phone call from DGFI and was told not to return home. A day later, I came back to Bangladesh through Singapore. After I landed at Dhaka airport, I discovered that five to six DGFI members surrounded me. They were not allowing me to go to my officials present there. A tall man told me that they wanted to have a cup of coffee with me and requested me to give them five minutes. I asked them to mind their language and maintain the protocol. Incensed, I said 'get lost'. They wanted to go with me in my car on the pretext of ensuring my security. I told them that I have a car and security and I don't need them and left. I thought it was another bad signal."

"I went to the court [SC]. One day, I just finished my work and the DGFI chief came to my office. He told me that the prime minister herself sent him and she asked me to resign and leave the country. I shouted 'who are you and what are you saying?' He [the DGFI chief] said they implement the orders of only the prime minister, not

the law minister or attorney general ... I asked him to get lost. Then I returned home and was put under house arrest.

"The Supreme Court registrar general told me that they had nothing to do. He told me to take leave for some days. I got mentally upset. My secretary prepared an application for a seven-day leave and I signed it. I returned home in the evening. I found all the gates of my residence closed. Military personnel in plainclothes occupied all the things inside my residence. My internet connections were disconnected.

"Around 10:00am the following day, I was doing my work at my residential office. Md Abdul Wahhab Miah called me over the phone and wanted to meet me. I asked him to come to my house. He [Wahhab] asked me to go to his residence. He said other judges are in his house. Instantly, I could sense that there was a conspiracy here. I called them to come to my house. Then they came and told me that they would not sit with me in the court. I could realise that the ground beneath my feet was vanishing. Being influenced by the government, they [judges] made this illegal decision."

Amid this situation, Justice Sinha left Dhaka on the night of October 13, 2017.

Justice Wahhab, who was then the senior-most judge of the Appellate Division, had performed the functions of the chief justice in the absence of Justice Sinha.

During his talks to this newspaper, Justice Sinha congratulated Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus on his becoming the interim government chief adviser and Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed the new chief justice.

The former chief justice said he is ready to return to Bangladesh.

"I will go to the country if my security is ensured. I'm waiting for a green signal. I will surrender before the court concerned and prove that the cases filed against me are false."

Justice Sinha, who resigned as the chief justice on November 11, 2017, while abroad, stands accused in three money-laundering cases. He has been convicted and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in a case and two other cases are under investigation.

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Former SC judge Manik, ASM Feroz detained

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formal procedures."

Justice Manik has been co-accused in several cases filed against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her several cabinet members, and several Awami League leaders recently.

Justice Manik has been at the centre of controversies several times over the years for his judgements and activities during his tenure as judge and after retiring.

Manik was appointed as an additional HC judge on July 3, 2001, for two years. The BNP, which assumed power in 2001, did not confirm his job.

On March 2, 2009, Manik was reinstated as a judge following an HC verdict after the AL government came to power.

He was appointed as a permanent HC judge on March 25, 2009.

On June 5, 2012, then ruling AL lawmakers said in parliament that Manik had violated the constitution by making "derogatory remarks" about the then speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Abdul Hamid.

Earlier in the same day, during the hearing of a rule, Justice Manik observed that the Speaker (Hamid) had committed an offence tantamount to sedition by commenting in the House on an HC order. He also said the speaker was completely ignorant of the apex court and the constitution.

Senior AL lawmaker Tofail Ahmed told parliament, "I was surprised to see how Justice Manik spoke against the speaker and accused him of sedition. We have no words to censure him."

The same judge, Tofail added, had once punished a traffic police officer for failing to salute him on the road. "I think he is a sadist who gets pleasure by hurting people."

Tofail also accused Manik of forcibly sitting in business class seats on Biman flight though he bought economy class tickets through the misuse of his position.

On March 31, 2013, he was promoted to the Appellate Division. Justice Manik retired on October 1, 2015. He was removed from the bench on orders from then chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha. Justice Manik had allegedly secretly recorded a conversation between him and justice Sinha, and published the conversation in the daily Janakantha.

In another development, ASM Feroz, chief whip of the 10th Jatiya Sangsad, was arrested from the capital's Banani last night, according to an SMS sent by Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Feroz, a former lawmaker from Patuakhali-2, served as a whip in the ninth parliament.

However, the DMP did not mention the case in which Feroz was arrested.

BB in talks with IMF

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upheaval following deadly protests that forced the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina earlier this month.

The violence that accompanied the anti-government protest has disrupted the garment exports, the country's main foreign exchange earner.

Reserves were already under pressure before the current crisis, and stood at \$20.5 billion as of July 31, just enough to cover about three months of imports, reports Bloomberg.

Mansur, a veteran economist who spent three decades at the IMF, was named governor of Bangladesh Bank last week by the interim government headed by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus.

The former Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder and two other deputy governors resigned as part of a string of bureaucratic departures following the fall of the previous government.

The central bank bought more than \$200 million in three days from the interbank market since Mansur was appointed governor at Bangladesh Bank on Aug 13, reports Bloomberg.

Dr Mansur said the central bank aims to buy as much as \$1 billion every month from local banks.

In the BBC interview, he emphasised that cleaning up the country's banking sector was his top priority when speaking to the BBC at the central bank's headquarters in the commercial heart of Dhaka.

There has been a "designed robbery of the financial system" which has caused significant damage to banks and has serious implications for the stock market and the broader economy, he suggested.

Bangladesh's banks have seen a flight of deposits and an alarming rise in non-performing assets following defaults by groups allegedly linked with the ousted Awami League government.

The non-performing assets were "just robbery of the banks. They took the money and put it in Singapore, Dubai, London and elsewhere. So the first effort would be to try to take people to task and get the money back," Dr Mansur told the BBC.

Customs halts release of 44 luxury cars

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from Chattogram, Mongla ports and Kamalapur ICD, were imported by cricket superstar Shakib Al Hasan, who was an MP from Magura-1; Faizur Rahman from Brahmanbaria-5; Golam Faruque Pinku from Lakshipur-3; Abul Kalam from Natore-1; Mujibur Rahman Manju from Kishoreganj-5; and Jannat Ara Henry, an MP of a reserved seat for women. The identity of one other ex-lawmaker has not been confirmed.

The bill of entry (the submission of import documents) for three of the 44 unreleased cars were filed in the name of Muhammad Zakaria from Dinajpur-1, Anupam Shahjahan Joy from Tangail-8, Nasima Zaman Bobby, an MP of a reserved seat for women.

The former lawmakers could not be reached for comments.

Customs officials said the identities of the other 41 former lawmakers would be known when import documents are filed.

According to documents, clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents, including Navana Ltd, facilitated the release of the seven vehicles on behalf of the importers.

Ripon Prakash Das, assistant general manager of C&F Agent Navana Ltd, said some vehicles were released under the names of former MPs.

"The release of these vehicles from the port requires an approval letter from the parliament speaker. The letter is not attainable now," he said.

Customs officials said the cars now must be released by paying the duties.

Chattogram Customs Commissioner Fyzur said they cannot seize the vehicles that were released before the parliament was dissolved.

The customs will seek instructions from the National Board of Revenue, he added.

BRTA Chairman Gautam Chandra Pal told The Daily Star that no vehicle

brought under the duty-free facility has been registered in August.

"We verify NBR documents when registering vehicles imported by MPs under the duty-free facility. The law does not mention whether the members of a dissolved parliament can avail the benefit."

"There is a way to stop the registration of these vehicles and collect the duty if the NBR or the law ministry instructs us not to register them."

The duty-free car facility was introduced during HM Ershad's rule in 1987 to please lawmakers. A notification in this regard was issued on May 24, 1988.

In the budget for fiscal year 2024-25, a proposal was made to impose 25 percent duty on the cars for MPs. The proposal was not accepted.

The tax exemption cost the government Tk 5,147 crore in lost revenue over the last 15 years.