

# Where are our loved ones?

Families of the victims of enforced disappearances speak freely for first time, demand probe and justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ayesha Ali has been praying every day for over 10 years to see her son.

As several people emerged from secret detention centres known as Aynaghar after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government early this month, Ayesha started hoping that her son Abdul Quader, who was 23 when he disappeared in December 2013, would knock on the door any moment.

"I touch his clothes everyday and I tell myself that he will come back. I keep looking out of the window, expecting to see him on the street," she said, breaking down in tears at a human chain at Central Shaheed Minar.

"Everyone says the country is now independent. Is the country not independent for my son?"

Other participants at the event then embraced Ayesha and tried to soothe her.

Quader, a student of finance at Jagannath University, was picked up by men claiming to be Rab members from the capital's Bashundhara area, family members said. He was a supporter of

the BNP.

Many other family members of the victims of enforced disappearance were at the event, marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

Mayer Daak, a platform for the families, has been commemorating this day since 2013.

Speaking about her brother Mazharul Russel who has been missing since 2013, another participant named Nusrat Jahan also broke down.

"I want to touch my brother's hands. He used to take me to the school on his bicycle. I have nightmares of him being locked in a dark room alone. 'Find me,' he says to me," Nusrat said.

She then urged Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus to take steps to investigate the secret prisons.

She said there must be Aynaghar at the facilities of law enforcers where "my brother and others are probably detained".

"We want to know whether our loved ones are alive or dead," she added.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

FAKHRUL CALLS FOR UN-LED INVESTIGATION -- PAGE 12



Overcome with emotion, a distraught Sadika Sarkar Safa, 10, speaks about her missing father Mahfuzur Rahman Sohel at a human chain in the Central Shaheed Minar area yesterday. Mahfuzur, a Chhatra Dal leader, has been missing since December 2013 when he was picked up by some plainclothes men in Dhaka. Mayer Daak, a platform of the families of the victims of enforced disappearances, organised the human chain marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 'I was forced to step down'

Ex-Islami Bank MD says he had to put signature on pad never used by the bank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Bank's former managing director Abdul Mannan had not appeared or spoken publicly since S Alam Group took control of the bank in March 2017.

Breaking more than seven years of silence yesterday, he said the infamous conglomerate forced Mannan at gunpoint to resign from his post at the Shariah-based bank after he was taken hostage by members of a security agency.

"I was forced to resign on a pad that the Islami Bank has never used since its inception in 1983 till date," Mannan said at a discussion yesterday where he recalled a few memories of his forced removal at that time.

The Forum for Bangladesh Studies organised the virtual event on "Elimination of Occupancy in the Banking Sector: Will the Plight End?".

Commemorating the deaths in the recent student-led movement that ousted the Awami League regime on August 5, he said: "Now I think I have freedom of expression. Earlier, I did not have the courage to speak even while staying abroad."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Abdul Mannan

## How UCB's Ronny acquired so much offshore assets

Ex-minister Javed, wife's bank accounts frozen, but his brother Anisuzzaman Ronny, wife Imrana remain unmarked

ZYMA ISLAM and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

As Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed's grip over United Commercial Bank (UCB) created a trail of disguised loans with abuse of political influence after he became a minister in 2019 back home, his brother Anisuzzaman Chowdhury Ronny's assets saw a meteoric rise in the UK.

Last year, The Daily Star reported that Javed, the former land minister, and his wife Rukhmila Zaman co-own over 260 properties in the UK while Bloomberg News had put the figures at over 350 properties worth about £200 million, or over Tk 3,143 crore.

This newspaper has now tracked five UK companies owned by Ronny and his wife Imrana Zaman Chowdhury together or individually with their business partners. The firms hold properties worth £22.31 million, or over Tk 350 crore, acquired after Javed's entry to now-deposed Hasina's cabinet.

The firms are Bitcom Real Estate Ltd, Ronny 42 Ltd, AA Mandarin Ltd,



Gilbert Street Estates Ltd and Sovereign Financing Ltd.

These companies all have a common trajectory - starting with pennies and no real income before suddenly acquiring high end properties in London. These are seemingly holding companies for stashing wealth from unknown sources

Ronny, wife opened five UK firms since 2019

The firms acquired Tk 350cr London properties

They had no viable source of income

This happened after Javed became minister

Disguised loans from UCB increased in this period

in the British real estate market.

For example, Ronny and Imrana incorporated Bitcom Real Estate Ltd in May 2020 with just a £100 issued capital. A little over a year later on July 15, 2021, the company purchased a £1.6 million apartment in a skyscraper called

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## RIGHTS VIOLATIONS UN to dispatch fact-finding team to Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Human Rights Office will dispatch a fact-finding team to Bangladesh in the coming weeks to conduct an impartial and independent investigation into the human rights violations committed between July 1 and August 15.

The decision came after Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus requested the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk for such a mission, said Spokesperson for the UN rights office Ravina Shamdasani at a press briefing in Geneva yesterday.

The fact-finding mission will investigate violations and abuses perpetrated during the mass protest, analyse root causes, and make recommendations to advance justice, accountability and way out for long-term reforms.

An advance team visited the country from August 22 to 29, meeting people including student leaders of the recent protests.

The team also met many advisers to the interim government, the chief justice, senior officers of the police and armed forces, lawyers, journalists and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



The parents of a child diarrhoea patient walk on the Feni Sadar Hospital premises with their daughter, who is on a drip. As many as 199 diarrhoea patients were admitted to the hospital as of 10:00am yesterday. Since the facility was at capacity, many patients could not be provided with a bed. Diarrhoea cases are on the rise in Feni as floodwaters are receding.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## India will deal with govt of the day

S Jaishankar says about Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Referring to the recent changes in Bangladesh, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar yesterday said they would deal with the government of the day.

"It is natural that we will deal with the government of the day," he said.

The minister said they have to recognise that there are political changes, and political changes can be disruptive.

"And clearly here, we have to look for mutuality of interest," Jaishankar said at the release of the book titled "Strategic Conundrums: Reshaping India's Foreign Policy", authored by Rajiv Sikri.

The Indian minister said everyone was aware that since Bangladesh's independence, the relationship between the two countries had its ups and downs.



US ready to turn page on Trump: Kamala Harris P6



Alcaraz makes 'no excuse' after shock defeat P11

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

### 14th Death Anniversary

Today is the 14th death anniversary of Late Alhaj Giashuddin Ahmed. On this day of remembrance, we the family members, directors, officers and employees of Popular Jute Exchange Limited as well as other sister concerns fondly recall the memories of his industrious & benevolent life, and pray for the salvation and eternal peace for his departed soul.

Late Alhaj Giashuddin Ahmed

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