

Hasina made accused in 3 more cases

STAR REPORT

Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina has been sued in three more cases over deaths in Dhaka and Narayanganj during the recent mass uprising.

She is now facing at least 95 cases, mostly for murders during the student-led protests that forced her to resign and flee the country on August 5. The other charges include crimes against humanity, genocide, attempted murder and abduction.

The Awami League chief and 26 others were sued over the death of Amir Hossain, a resident of West Rampura in Dhaka. His wife Anni filed the case with the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Afnan Sumi who asked the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to investigate the incident and submit a report.

In her complaint, Anni alleged that her husband was shot dead in front of Bangladesh Television (BTV) Bhaban around 2:40pm on July 19 during the quota reform protests that culminated in the mass uprising.

Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader and several leaders and activists of the AL and its front organisations are among the accused in the case.

Another case was filed against Hasina, former law minister Shafique Ahmed, former attorney general AM Amin Uddin, Supreme Court lawyer Tania Amir and 293 others over the death of student Inran Hossain at Kutubkhali in the capital's Jatrabari on August 5.

Inran's mother Kohinur Akhter on Sunday filed the case at Jatrabari Police Station, a sub-inspector working at the court said yesterday.

Former deputy attorney general Motaheer Hossain Sazu, prosecutors of International Crimes Tribunal Muklesur Rahman Badal and Syed Haider Ali, former information adviser to the former prime minister Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, president of advisory council of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee Shahriar Kabir, Ekattor TV CEO and Editor Mommazel Haque Babu and senior journalist Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul are also among the accused.

In Narayanganj, another murder case was lodged at Siddhirganj Police Station, accusing Hasina and 129 others over the death of automobile mechanic Mostofa Kamal Razu, 36, who was shot dead in the Shimrail area during the quota reform movement on July 20.

His wife Aklima Akter filed the case on Tuesday night, our local correspondent reports.

Students to hold

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Kalabagan, Dhanmondi, Manik Mia Avenue, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Bangla Motor, and Shahbagh before ending at the Central Shaheed Minar.

"We will not celebrate the victory until the human and constitutional rights are restored. We must uphold the spirit of the movement," said Sarjis.

He asked people to take part spontaneously and speak about the misrule of the last government and their desires from the interim government.

Meanwhile, student leaders warned that law enforcement agencies would deal with anyone involved in controversial activities, like extortion and torture.

"We urge the people to hand over anyone attempting to tarnish the spirit of the student movement," said Abu Baker Majumder, another coordinator.

He announced the formation of a fact-finding committee to identify those who opened fire on protesters during the uprising.

On forming their own political party, Abu Baker said they would travel across the country and listen to people's opinion on the matter.

Hasnat Abdullah, a key organiser of the movement, said, "They [the Awami League government] used every state machinery for Awami League's fascism. Over the last 15 years, they made the culture of labelling people 'Jamaat-Shibir' to silence the voices of dissent."

He said the AL made a "religion" and "portrayed Sheikh Mujib as a prophet".

Hasnat said the AL established a culture in which Sheikh Mujib was beyond criticism and the people and the media had to accept it.

He said the media was gagged or controlled by the government.

"A news that is liked by the government is not a news, rather it is merely a press release. We now request journalists to question the authorities."

He said, "Some people are now taking to the streets with various demands. Why did they not raise any question in the last 15 years? Now we have learnt to question the authorities and we have to keep this up."

Hasnat said the constitution of 1972 was not a national constitution, rather it was AL's constitution.

"We accepted it as the national constitution and through that the Awami League first sowed the seeds of fascism. We have to remain united, so that fascism never returns. Now that we are united, they are trying to create divisions.

"We need to set some principles and values to reorganise the state to make sure that fascism cannot return in any form. We expect a state where the people will not have to take to the streets to realise any demand."



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) walks with Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah (L) and Brunei's Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah (C) after their meeting at Istana Nurul Iman in Bandar Seri Begawan yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Labour unrest intensifies

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Industrial police, army and border guards were deployed in the area.

Workers blocked the Nabinagar-Chandra Highway at Palashbari around midday, the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Gazipur around 7:30am, and Bhogra bypass road around the same time.

Many factories were closed in Gazipur, police told our Gazipur correspondent.

GOVT TO GO TOUGH

"Who will benefit if the factories are destroyed? The workers are not creating chaos. Most of those who are doing this are outsiders," said Adviser Hassan.

Addressing the workers, he said, "You stop them. If you stop them, we will be by your side."

He then remarked that it was hard to tell the workers from the outsiders.

As a reporter asked what kind of steps would be taken, he said, "We will think more about it. They can be arrested or detained. If 50 people sit on the road, five lakh suffer. You have to use force to remove them."

The other advisers who attended the meeting are Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Choudhury of home ministry, Prof Asif Nazrul of law, Farida Akhter of fisheries and livestock, Adilur Rahman Khan of industries, and Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain of labour and employment.

Asif said both Awami League and BNP activists were behind the unrest in different places.

"Labour leaders told me that they visited the places and found that local homeless children, wearing helmets and shorts were hired for the different [protest] programmes," he said.

The Awami League supporters who used to control the business of leftover fabric were gone.

"I already said the government will take stern action against those trying to grab those businesses and committing crimes."

Asked who were trying to control

Many barely hanging on to life

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Raiyan's family has been by his side round the clock. He attempts to tug at the tubes attached to his body in sudden fits, they say.

"He hardly recognises us," Raiyan's elder brother Ayman Ahmed told this newspaper. They have been with him for the last 18 days at Dhaka's National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital.

A student of Silam PL Multilateral High School in Sylhet, Raiyan was among a crowd standing in front of the South Shurma Police Station when the police opened fire.

After 12 days of treatment at Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital, Raiyan's condition deteriorated and he was moved to Dhaka. But medical costs have become a major worry for the family of modest means.

Raiyan's father who works at a local bookshop can hardly afford the Tk 7,000 that they are spending for the treatment every day.

"We have already spent around Tk 2 lakh. We received financial assistance from a few organisations. But that was not much," said Ayman.

Further, the doctors are uncertain if, at all, and when they might be able to remove the lead slug from Raiyan's meninges, which are the several layers of membranes that protect the brain.

"We are losing hope. And it breaks our hearts," said the elder brother in a choking voice.

Raiyan is only one of about 17,000 people wounded, crippled and disabled during the protests. According to reports and estimates, including one by the health ministry, hundreds of protesters have lost the use of one eye or have become blind and hundreds more have had limbs amputated. Many others, like Ratul, are still undergoing treatment.

Not too far from Raiyan lies another young boy – Junaid Islam Ratul. He has been unconscious for 27 days. Struck with over 100 pellets in the chest and other parts of the body, the sixth grader from Bogura briefly gained his senses on September 4.

He asked his mother to take him home before slipping back. This student of PATH Public School was wounded when police opened fire on a crowd with their shotguns on August 5.

Ratul's elder brother Rahat holds up an X-ray showing the pellet wounds. "He used to dream of joining the army. I don't know if he will ever do that now," said Rahat.

Despite the futility of the question,

the business, Asif Mahmud said, "There are local Awami League leaders in some places. We also have information that some local BNP leaders are involved.

"We are talking to the central leaders of the BNP ... so that they restrain them [local leaders]. We will take a tough stance against the local influential Awami League leaders who are still there. They will be arrested, and police will take action as per law," he said.

BGMEA President Rafiqul told a press conference that the factory owners agreed to keep all the factories open from today as army, border guards, police and Rab would be deployed near the factories.

He added that some factories had been vandalised. "We are very careful not to tarnish our image before the foreigners, particularly to the clients," he said.

Police will gain the confidence they lost because of the questionable role played by some policemen during the mass uprising that toppled the government, he added.

Intelligence agencies learned that two or three groups were involved in the unrest, he added.

Workers are not directly involved with the anarchy, he said.

Abdullah Hill Rakib, BGMEA vice president, said the industry needed cooperation political parties' cooperation.

PHARMACEUTICAL UNITS

Abdul Muktedir, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI), said workers assaulted guards in different factories.

The unrest, which has been continuing for over a couple of weeks, has halted production at 19 major pharmaceutical plants.

"We are not getting proactive support from the government and the law enforcement agencies. The sector is not getting the importance," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rahat could not help blurring out, "When will my brother come home?"

The future is not looking much better for the 20-year-old Nupur Chowdhury being treated for gunshot wounds in her legs. She was shot during a protest march in Mirpur on the same day as the other two.

Currently being treated at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), Nupur has not been able to walk since she was shot.

At NITOR, 103 injured people are currently undergoing treatment of whom 13 have lost their legs, one an arm.

Sohan Shah was on his way home after work when he was shot in the chest



Raiyan Ahmed

Junaid Islam

on July 19. The bullet still lodged close to his lungs and heart, the 28-year-old lies awake from constant pain at the National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital.

Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum said, "More than 1,000 people were killed and over 400 blinded during the protests."

The National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital reports that between July 17 and September 4, 17 patients lost sight in both eyes, and 366 have lost the use of one eye. The hospital treated over 700 patients during that time.

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital has also seen an influx of patients, with more than 250 treated for eye injuries. Among them, 52 had surgeries. Of them, 24 lost the use of one eye and four were completely blinded.

Mobin, 16, is one who has become blind. Doctors say that the injuries were too severe for him to ever regain eyesight.

Originally from Damudya in Shariatpur, Mobin worked at a computer store at Uttara where he was shot in both eyes on July 18 during a clash between protesters and police.

Although the interim government announced on August 17 that it would bear the costs of medical treatment for the injured, the assistance has yet to make its way to the patients.

How Hasina's playbook was undone

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some cases. Sadly, her role in Bangladesh's economic prosperity for which she was feted globally will be a faded memory.

The month leading to Hasina's dramatic downfall was littered with death and destruction. Trigger-happy security forces, who were blamed for hundreds of deaths as the protests turned violent in mid-July, were out with full force. Videos of police shooting point-blank at nonviolent protesters emerged almost every day. Her brutal tactics led to an unprecedented bloodbath in any mass uprising in the region in memory.

Dystopian scenes vividly captured in photographs and videos by this newspaper as well as other media outlets will remain etched in our memory. Bangladesh became a symbol of nervous trauma. It was as if things were disintegrating from the centre. It also showed how peaceful protests lumbered into mindless mayhem. At one point, Hasina's government ordered a complete shutdown of the internet, the modern-day lifeline, knocking daily life out of balance, and taking Bangladesh back to the forgotten analogue age. That didn't quell the protests, started by university students but by now joined by people of every class and age groups, including women and children.

The government deployed platoons of paramilitary troops alongside the police to stem the ferocity of demonstrations with teargas shells, rubber bullets and gunfire. But the day wasn't saved as one act of vengeance spawned another round of violence. Hasina's party unleashed its youth wing on the streets to reclaim their turf. Bloodbath continued unchecked. The death toll climbed.

Hasina's government admitted, for the first time, that they were pushed to the wall, a comment that came with horrific finality. It was a precursor to something more ominous – curfew. The deployment of the army on July 19, while it was undeniably necessary, tore the veil of stability that gave a fillip to the economy for more than a decade. The story of stability, sellable to foreign investors, lost much of its credibility. It also showed the government's struggle in its new term to hold things together as Bangladesh hurtled into an uncertain future.

DAYS OF UNYIELDING ANGER

Protests, anger and vengeance inhabited the period from July 16 to August 6. With the passing of each day, protests turned more violent and the mob burgeoned. In speed and scope, the violence went far beyond anything Hasina believed possible. Government establishments and vehicles were set on fire and two metro stations were vandalised in Mirpur. For their part, law enforcement agencies

unleashed aerial fury by raining down rubber bullets and teargas shells on protesters from the sky, a newfound tactic. Street vendors and pedestrians were unwitting victims of the government's vengeance.

Ambulances, their sirens on, ferried the injured to hospitals, stretching health services in Dhaka and beyond. According to an initial count by the United Nations, 650 people were killed in Bangladesh with nearly 400 deaths reported from July 16 to August 4, and a further 250 in the new wave of violence between August 5-6. The health adviser in the interim government later said the death toll could be as high as 1,000. The Daily Star has so far been able to confirm more than 550 deaths.

The weight of the dead was too heavy. Shortly before midday, on August 5, Hasina was seen hurrying into a waiting helicopter in a disgraceful exit from Bangladesh. Her departure, which came after she lost the army's support, sparked jubilation across the country. Millions of people descended on the streets to celebrate the fall of her government, a significant turning point in the nation's history, amid dramatic and sometimes chaotic events.

As the news of her exit spread, the day became more volatile. The entire nation was in flux. Thousands of people stormed Gono Bhaban, the prime minister's official residence, looting souvenirs, frolicking on the premises and grinning for selfies as they posed with the loot. People toppled a statue of independence leader and Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Arsonists set fire to the Bangabandhu Museum in Dhanmondi, in what the Crisis Group said was "an act of grotesque retribution". Reprisal attacks on Awami League leaders, sympathisers and religious minorities continued for the next few days.

It was almost unthinkable in January that Hasina's government would fall apart, just seven months into her fourth consecutive term, however deeply flawed the election may be. But support for the government was clearly waning. The largest opposition force, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, had boycotted the vote and turnout was conspicuously low. Global leaders were hesitant to congratulate Hasina on the win.

Hasina returned to power after winning the 2008 election in a landslide, but she seemed to have lost confidence along the way and rigged the subsequent three elections to hold on to power. And the regime became increasingly unaccountable for its wrongdoing. Internally, her overbearing presence hollowed out the party and other members lost their voices and roles. It morphed into a one-person party, and as such, a one-person government.

'People's pent-up anger fuelled the movement'

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The key point is – unlike 1969 and 1990, this movement had no political or specific leadership. Above all, Hasina's actions to suppress the movement led to the government's fall.

DS: You demanded the AL government's resignation on August 2 from the "Droho Jatra" march. Then came students' "one-point movement". How did the aspirations come together?

Anu Muhammad: There is no justification for the way Abu Sayed (slain Rangpur student leader) was shot. At one stage, when public university students could not tackle the situation, their private university peers joined in. Students from colleges and even schools joined the movement.

Around 200 people lost their lives at one point. In response, the general public joined the movement. Hasina called for talks all the while trying to suppress the movement by arresting its coordinators. That's why we organised the march. People were united in the collective demand for the government's resignation.

The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement on August 3 announced the single-point demand for the government's resignation in a massive rally.

DS: How is the interim government functioning? What should be their main job?

Anu Muhammad: The government has several important jobs: firstly, publish the full list of those killed and injured; secondly, take full responsibility for the treatment of the injured and send them abroad if necessary; thirdly, take responsibility for the families of the deceased and critically injured who have lost the capability to earn.

Besides, incidents like the torture of teachers or the suffering of minorities must stop. Attacks on

sculptures, statues, and memorials of liberation are not acceptable in any way. The government must clear its position on these matters. Holding free and fair polls will also be an important task of the government.

Its main challenge will be to tackle quarters with self-interests, international lobbies, and civil and military bureaucracies – the three groups who want their interests protected. But the utmost strength of the government is the people. If transparency and accountability can be created, people will support this government wholeheartedly.

DS: What should be the new political settlement?

Anu Muhammad: We're talking about a discrimination-free Bangladesh which won't return to the previous system again. For this, political parties need major reforms. They should ensure democracy within themselves. Their activities should align with the people's interests. Without these, I have doubts if the parties will bring something new.

DS: There's a talk on amending or rewriting the constitution to prevent fascism. What can the government do about it?

Anu Muhammad: The 1972 constitution had several contradictions and it needs some major changes. This government can't do it alone. It can set up a "constitution commission" with competent people and let the commission form public opinion with their recommendations. Later, it can be decided whether these changes should be made through the constituent assembly, constitutional amendments, or a referendum.

DS: The law and order situation is not stable and it is the same old picture with arrests and abrupt cases. Why are these things repeating?

Anu Muhammad: This is because of the law enforcement agencies' pattern of work. The government

Hasina concentrated so much power in her hands and antagonised many who came into her orbit. The Awami League, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in June, and a party that has been a part of democratic movements from even before Bangladesh's independence, the leading party in Bangladesh's liberation war, seemed to have lost touch with the people.

Over time, Hasina who fits the playbook of a dictator became emotionally detached, unable to empathise with the suffering of people. This detachment manifested itself in increasingly brutal responses to anti-government protests. To maintain control, Hasina, like an isolated authoritarian ruler, often resorted to widespread surveillance and violent crackdowns on dissent. These factors created a feedback loop where her isolation exacerbated paranoia and repressive tendencies, ultimately leading to a more oppressive regime.

BEGINNING OF AN END

Protests erupted in Bangladesh in early July, when students began agitating against the reintroduction of controversial quotas for government jobs. The movement emerged amid widespread discontent with Hasina's government, which had grown increasingly authoritarian and had badly mismanaged the economy.

"It was Hasina's reaction to the protests that was her downfall. She sealed her fate when she decided to crack down rather than pursue dialogue with protest leaders," the Crisis Group said in a report.

As demonstrations swelled across the country in mid-July, law enforcement agencies tried but failed to suppress the student-led uprising with the majority of them being young protesters. Police and paramilitary units used "unnecessary and disproportionate" force and resorted to extrajudicial killings, a level of political violence rarely seen in Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. Even after the Supreme Court drastically reduced the job quotas on July 21, protests continued to gather steam, advancing new demands, including accountability for the killings and the government's resignation. That showed signs of Hasina's troubles ahead.

On August 4, a final, terrible round of bloodshed before the collapse of the government left close to 100 people dead, most of them protesters shot by police and ruling-party members acting as vigilantes. The next day, hundreds of thousands heeded student leaders' calls to march on Dhaka and poured into Shahbagh, defying another curfew. Just six kilometres away, Hasina packed up and fled Gono Bhaban. She found refuge in India, the next-door neighbour.

should deal with it first. These cases won't last. For example, Shakib Al Hasan was sued for a murder that occurred when he was playing abroad, which is not credible. If these old habits don't change, the result will be the same.

So, the government must find a solution. It's right that a month is much less time, but not less to give instructions or directions.

DS: There is this idea of banning student politics in educational institutions. What's your take on it?

Anu Muhammad: Political party-led student organisations, especially those affiliated with the government, create problems in student politics. I don't see anything wrong with student politics. This time the student protesters claimed they were not associated with politics, but still they changed the regime. What can be healthier than such a form of student politics?

DS: There's a growing anti-India sentiment among the people. What should be the government's foreign policy?

Anu Muhammad: India had more influence on Bangladesh because of the AL and Hasina. The US, China and Japan also have influence here. It cannot be said that India will not dominate again because the BNP and the Jamaat have said they want to have good relations with India. Besides, no decision has been reached so far on cancelling the agreements with India, including transit and other controversial deals. The government should disclose the agreements with all the countries, including India.

DS: How long should this government stay?

Anu Muhammad: It depends on the speed of this government's work. A lot can be done with the concurrent energy of the revolution. It is possible to establish within six months a basis for some of the urgent tasks.