

Another ICT case filed against Hasina

BSS, Dhaka

Another complaint has been filed with the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina over the killing of Farhan Faiyaz, a 17-year-old student of Dhaka Residential Model College (DRMC), during the student movement in the city's Mohammadpur area on July 18.

Farhan's father, Shahidul Islam, filed the complaint with the ICT's investigation agency yesterday, accusing Hasina and 33 others.

With this, Hasina, who was ousted on August 5 following a student-led mass uprising, is facing 13 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide.

The other accused include Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, former law minister Anisul Huq, former Dhaka South City Corporation mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, AL Presidium member Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, Chhatra League President Saddam Hossain, and former DMP joint commissioner Biplob Kumar Sarker.

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Workers demonstrating in front of a garment factory owned by Amtranet Group in Tongi, Gazipur, yesterday. They have six demands, including better pay, four months of maternity leave, and free dinner on days when they work until 11:00pm.

928 inmates still at large

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guards and immigrations police, according to sources in law enforcement.

Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Syed Muhammad Motahar Hussain said most inmates who fled had cashed in on a chaotic situation during the uprising that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5.

He said many convicts learnt about the fall of the government from different sources, including BTV news bulletins.

"Prisoners are still saying that the country has achieved independence. They are arguing that after the independence in 1971, prisoners were freed, then why they are not being freed now," Motahar told The Daily Star.

He said the prison breaks happened due to poor structures and the jail officials failing to see the revolt coming.

"We have learnt our lesson and have taken steps so that such incidents never recur ... Steps have also been taken to arrest the absconding convicts," said the IG prisons, who took charge on August 11.

According to jail officials, 826 prisoners, including nine militants, fled from the Narsingdi district jail after the prison's main gate was set on fire during clashes between police and people on July 19, over two weeks before Hasina fled to India.

Until Sunday, 622 of them, including three militants, either surrendered or have been arrested.

After the fall of the Hasina-led government, 1,415 inmates fled from the Kashimpur High-Security Jail; and Satkhira, Kusthia, and Sherpur jails following demonstrations by some inmates and attack by their cohorts and relatives from the outside, sources said.

➡ **826 inmates fled from Narsingdi jail, 204 still missing**

➡ **203 escaped from Kashimpur jail, 200 yet to be found**

➡ **596 bolted from Satkhira jail, 73 still absconding**

➡ **518 fled from Sherpur jail, 412 still on the run**

➡ **98 ran away from Kusthia jail, 38 yet to be found**

At least 200 out of the 203 prisoners who escaped from Kashimpur High-Security Jail are still to be found, said its Jailer Lutfur Rahman.

Of those who fled from Satkhira, Kusthia, and Sherpur jails, 689 either surrendered or were arrested. The

authorities do not know where the remaining 523 are.

Hasna Jahan Bithi, jailer of the Satkhira jail, told this newspaper that around 73, including condemned prisoners, are traceless.

Mohammad Humayun Kabir Khan, superintendent of Sherpur jail, said at least 106 of the 518 that fled from the prison surrendered later to Mymensingh and Jamalpur jails.

He said 91 inmates who surrendered later got bail.

Of the 88 escaped condemned convicts, Rab has so far arrested four.

LT Col Md Munim Ferdous, director of the legal and media wing of Rab headquarters, told The Daily Star, "We have increased vigilance and are conducting joint drives. Our main focus is to recover illegal and stolen firearms, but we are also giving priority to finding escaped inmates."

Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, said, "The inmates, who surrendered so far, are wanted for petty crimes. Most of the dangerous criminals, including those condemned, are still on the run."

"These criminals may try to reorganise or link up with gangs again. It's a security threat for the society. They need to be arrested as soon as possible," he opined.

[Our correspondents in Gazipur, Mymensingh, and Kusthia contributed to this report.]

Power supply may not improve anytime soon

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The unit was supplying around 200MW of electricity.

Md Abu Bakkar Siddique, the chief engineer of the power plant, attributed the shutdown to the failure to conduct timely repairs by the Chinese contractor Harbin International.

Harbin did not adhere to contractual obligations regarding maintenance, he said, adding that the Chinese contractor had requested two weeks to resolve the technical fault.

Until then, small-scale businesses and battery-run autorickshaws will have to suffer.

Abdul Hannan, a rice miller in Bochaganj upazila of Dinaipur, said his mill's output has dropped significantly because of the unusual power cuts.

Sultan Mahmud, who runs a PVC printing business in Nawabganj upazila, said his business was affected by the frequent power cuts for the last couple of days.

"We are getting at least six hours' of power cuts every 24 hours," he said.

Load-shedding has hit Dhaka as well, according to data from the two distribution companies – Dhaka Power Distribution Company and Dhaka Electric Supply Company. The two companies faced around 500MW of supply shortfall yesterday.

At least 25 gas-fired power plants have been shut since May 27 when cyclone Remal hit the coastal areas.

The cyclone damaged one of the country's two floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs), which brought down the LNG regasification capacity to 600 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) from 1,100 mmcf.

The FSRU tried to resume operations several times but failed.

It is now slated to resume operations on September 15, as per the interim

government's recent announcement.

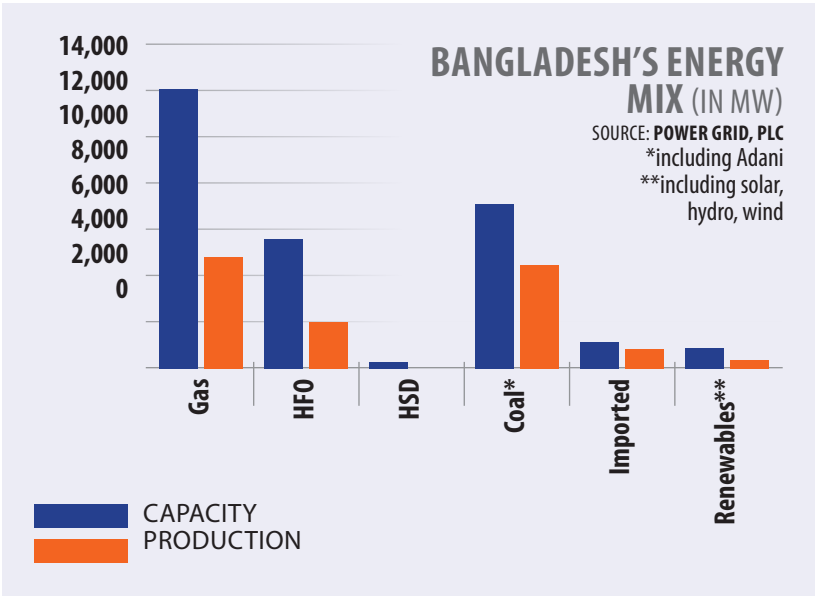
However, a PDB official said even if the FSRU comes into operation then, the situation will not improve immediately as the liquefied natural gas cargo will not arrive.

The government initiated the purchase process only recently and it will take at least two weeks for the

Tk 35,000 crore, most of which need to be paid in dollars, The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the proceedings.

Due to the dollar crunch, those payments have been put on hold, they said.

As of September 4, gross foreign exchange reserves stood at about \$20.6



cargo to arrive, he said.

Besides the gas shortfall, PDB officials are pinning the blame for frequent power cuts on insufficient electricity generation by the coal-based power plants due to various technical issues.

In the meantime, the Adani Godda power plant, which has outstanding bills of about \$800 million, is supplying about 500MW less following instructions from PDB.

PDB has outstanding bills of about

billion, enough to service about four months' import bill, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

The dollar crunch has interrupted the import of primary fuel including coal, gas and furnace oil, which hit the power sector, according to the officials concerned.

Subsequently, PDB has been unable to ramp up production despite higher demand due to the rising mercury.

The country's total power generation capacity is 27,086MW.

Deputy secys scuffle inside Secretariat

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around 5:00pm, and left the office around 6:15pm.

Over the last two days, the interim government appointed 59 DCs. Gazette notifications for the appointment of 34 were issued yesterday.

The agitating officials said they were aggrieved by the appointments as they were not on the list despite being deprived during the Awami League government's tenure.

"We have demanded the cancellation of the gazette [of the DC appointment]. We have also explained why it should be revoked," an official of 24th batch, who was among the protesters, told The Daily Star.

He said the cabinet secretary assured them of forwarding their demands to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, who is also in charge of the public administration ministry.

"We are awaiting his response," he added, on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

A top official of the public administration ministry said several changes might be made to the list after yesterday's incident.

A number of officials alleged that some of the newly-appointed DCs have big investments in stock market, had harassed their colleagues in the past, and were closely associated with Awami League and Chhatra League.

They added that some of the new appointees were also reportedly close to former ministers.

"We were deprived during the Awami League's tenure. We were not given field administration positions because it was feared that we might influence the election. We couldn't become deputy commissioners. But even after the fall of the Awami League government, we are being deprived," said another official, wishing not to be named.

Between 4:00pm and 6:15pm when the agitating officials took position in front of the cabinet secretary's office and held talks with him inside his office, some secretaries and senior officials could not meet the cabinet secretary. Mahbub Hossain, the cabinet secretary, left his office around 7:30pm.

Public Administration Secretary Mokhesur Rahman left his office around 12:30pm and did not return for the rest of the day.

Asked about the incident, a Cabinet Division official said a newly appointed DC's Facebook profile featured a photo of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Resentments ran high after this photo went viral, eventually leading to the scuffle.

Another official said that in recent days, ministry officials saw a man in KM Ali Azam's room. Ali Azam had been consulting with this man for extended periods. Other officials were not allowed in during these meetings.

These meetings behind closed doors sparked suspicions among the disgruntled officials, who believe that recommendations for the DC appointment might have come through this outsider.

DCs are responsible for overseeing general administrative activities, maintaining law and order, and managing land as collectors. They also play a key role in implementing special programmes of elected governments and ongoing development projects. The position of DC is considered one of the most prestigious roles in the administration, second only to the secretary.

India-funded projects to continue

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ours," he said in response to queries from reporters after the meeting with Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma at the former's Secretariat office yesterday.

The issues regarding the implementation and disbursement under the three Indian LoCs were discussed at the meeting. There were some issues related to the disbursement of funds under the LoCs.

Bangladesh and India signed the first LoC agreement involving \$862 million in August 2010, the second one involving \$2 billion in March 2016 and the third one involving \$4.5 billion in March 2017.

"We have assured him [Verma] that Bangladesh is a very good place for investment and economic cooperation.

They [the Indian side] have taken note and will continue the cooperation," said Salehuddin.

The meeting also discussed how to enhance the existing economic cooperation, he said, adding that India and Bangladesh have many areas of economic cooperation and trade.

The existing bilateral trade relationship is heavily tilted in favour of India, but the issue would be sorted out, he said.

The adviser said Verma has assured him that they would encourage more quality export of Bangladeshi products to India and that should be a win-win situation for both the countries.

The Indian side also offered support to Bangladesh in the fields of science and technology and scientific research

and laboratory, Salehuddin added.

India has not stopped any of its LoC projects in Bangladesh since those are big projects, Verma said.

"Those projects are going on and those are basically very big projects and located at different sites. So, the contractors will be coming back to start the projects."

The revolving issue of implementation of projects would be resolved through mutual cooperation and the approach of the Indian side is positive in this regard.

Asked about the Indian government's engagement with the interim government, Verma said, "Of course, we are very closely engaging with the government and my meeting with the adviser is proof of that."

Freeze assets laundered

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left over 1,000 dead," TI Bangladesh and TI US said in a joint letter.

Signed by Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIIB, and Gary Kalman, executive director of TI US, the letter said, "Now, serious evidence regarding the misappropriation of state assets by former Bangladeshi officials and their allies are being unearthed. These assets ultimately belong to the people of Bangladesh, which is why we write to urge the US government to identify and move to freeze any such assets in the US."

"The process to recover those assets should begin quickly so that the funds can help Bangladesh build a more transparent, accountable, democratic and inclusive future. Corruption allegations involving former ministers, bankers, senior public officials, the armed forces, and police are overwhelming," read the letter addressed to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of

the Treasury Janet Yellen.

Iftekharuzzaman and Kalman identified three ways that the US government could provide critical support to the interim government to address corruption and money laundering.

Firstly, the US government can investigate whether any assets looted by any Bangladeshi individual or company are recoverable property in the US, and act swiftly to impose property and account freezing orders as the first step to facilitate their forfeiture and repatriation to Bangladesh and hold the perpetrators to account.

Secondly, the US could offer expertise including from forensic accountants, lawyers and law enforcement to support reforms and capacity building of Bangladesh's relevant institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission, Financial Intelligence Unit, Criminal Investigation Department, National

Board of Revenue and Attorney General's Office so that they can identify stolen assets, build a robust evidence base for freezing these assets, and facilitate swift law enforcement action to recover them.

The US could also work with the governments of the UK, Canada, Australia, EU, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and UAE (particularly Dubai), and with the Bangladesh interim government, and in-country experts including the civil society in Bangladesh, to identify key targets for imposing financial sanctions and visa bans, read the letter.

"As a long-standing partner of Bangladesh, the US can offer timely support at this crucial time in Bangladesh's history. The US can show its genuine partnership by playing a proactive role in helping the people of Bangladesh recover the assets that rightly belong to them and that are so desperately needed to rebuild its future," read the letter.

‘Underpaid jail guards susceptible to bribery’

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"We have failed to address these issues effectively. That is why the problems have now become almost 'an epidemic'."

Motahar said they were taking some measures, including introduction of a digital system for inmate management, so that such problems could be addressed.

"Once the system is in place, allocation of cells to the inmates or moving them from one jail to another would be easier.

"We may not be able to eradicate the problems, but we are trying our level best to minimise them and make the situation tolerable," said the prisons chief.

Talking about jail staffers, Motahar said they are stressed-out personnel. "Although we have widened the prison areas and increased the number of jails over the years, the workforce has remained the same."

He said that the government plans

to boost the jail workforce to 29,000 in phases.

"The approval for recruiting around 1,800 staffers is in the final stage, which might ease the situation somewhat. However, the government must approve hiring the new staffers as assessed to ensure jail security."

At present, the Department of Prisons has 10,719 staffers managing 68 jails with over 75,000 inmates.

According to sources, the starting monthly salary of a jail guard is Tk 16,700. Although officially their shift is eight hours a day, they often work between 12 and 14 hours daily without overtime allowance.

Jail guards are also given ration benefits for families of up to four members.

Regarding the unauthorised use of mobile phones inside jails, the IG prisons said, "It is quite embarrassing for us. When persons with serious criminal records get access to

communication devices, it becomes harmful for society. We have devices like jammers to stop such practice. We are planning to install more such devices to address the problem."

Motahar, who took charge on August 11, said they were working on constructing new prison buildings in phases.

"We are inspecting the jail buildings across the country to assess the weaknesses and ensure foolproof security."

The prison chief said, "In addition to expanding the thickness of the walls, we are considering some other preventive measures. We have learned from a recent incident in which a 20-inch thick wall was breached."

In the early hours of June 26, four condemned inmates escaped from Bogura District Jail breaching the ceiling of the death row. The authorities acted swiftly and arrested those convicts on that very day.