

Mayer Daak leader's brother picked up, later freed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sanjida Islam Tulee, one of the coordinators of Mayer Daak, yesterday alleged that army personnel picked up her elder brother Saiful Islam Shyamol from their Shaheenbagh home in the capital and freed him hours later.

Quoting family members, she told journalists that army members came in three vehicles and entered their home around 2:30pm. They then raided the two-storey building for one and a half hours.

Tulee was at a programme of Mayer Daak, a platform for family members of victims of enforced disappearances, during the raid.

She alleged that army members showed Saiful a long list of allegations against him, including possession of illegal arms and involvement in drug dealing and extortion, and asked him to sign the list.

Saiful refused to sign it, saying that he is not involved in any such crime, Tulee said.

The army personnel then asked him to

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A number of people, some accompanying children, squeeze themselves between road dividers to cross a road in the capital's Jatrabari, with a footbridge just a few feet away. The photo was taken yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

UP chairman shot dead in broad daylight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A union parishad chairman was shot dead in broad daylight by unidentified criminals at his office in Daulatpur upazila of Kushtia yesterday.

The deceased Naimuddin Sentu, 60, served as the chairman of Philipnagar Union Parishad. He was a former vice-president of the Daulatpur upazila BNP.

The incident took place around 11:30am, said Mahabubur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Daulatpur Police Station.

Witnesses said unidentified armed criminals fired 3-4 rounds at the chairman through the window while he was working in his office and fled the scene.

He died on the spot.

Hearing gunshots, locals rushed to the scene, prompting the assailants to fire at them, ensuing panic in the area. The tension escalated further when the chairman's supporters arrived at the office.

In this situation, police struggled to reach the site of the incident. The body of the chairman was at the site till 2:00pm, said locals.

Dissolution of panel

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In the statement, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the "New Bangladesh" should be a nation built on the principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability, free from religious or ideological imposition.

"However, we are alarmed by efforts to spread malice, hatred, and hostility against non-communal spirit and pluralism, which are gaining momentum," he added.

"The interim government is compromising by succumbing to the propaganda and threats posed by self-interested factions. A troubling example of this is the cancellation of the coordination committee to amend and revise textbooks, which not only represents a concession to fundamentalism and communalism but also betrays the very aspirations of 'New Bangladesh' for a non-discriminatory, non-communal, and democratic future," he added.

He further said, "No matter how overpowered the oppressive and communal forces that have emerged from the ruins of authoritarianism are, and no matter how hard they try to impose their discriminatory ideology on society, we firmly believe that the mainstream of the anti-discrimination movement will not allow such forces to thrive."

The strength of the interim

government lies in the core values of the anti-discrimination movement – pluralism, inclusiveness, equality, and non-communalism.

In the statement, TIB hoped that the government would continue to uphold its responsibility to reform the state and steadfastly avoid compromising with all forms of malign forces, especially communal and fundamentalist factions.

The NCTB is responsible for the development of curriculums and the production and distribution of textbooks in primary and secondary education.

Earlier in June this year, the NCTB removed a story titled "Sharifa's Tale" from the 7th-grade history and social science book amid criticisms from Islamist groups.

In February 2023, it dropped two textbooks "History and Social Science: An Inquiry-based Reader" for 6th and 7th graders, giving in to the pressure from different Islamist groups that said the books were promoting the "debatable" Darwin's theory of evolution and demeaning the Islamic attire for women.

Meanwhile, 122 citizens, including writers, teachers, and political activists, in a statement yesterday demanded that the coordination committee for revising the textbooks be reinstated.

The citizens said they were

concerned by the rising influence of a particular religious group that is replacing the space once occupied by the Awami fascism.

"This group, by promoting a one-sided and manipulative interpretation of religion, is spreading hatred and intolerance against the pluralistic cultural fabric of society, thereby threatening social peace, democratic atmosphere, and the rights of diverse opinions and identities based on religion, language, ethnicity, and gender," the statement said.

Students of Dhaka University yesterday protested the cancellation of the textbook revision committee and the labelling of Professor Samina Luthfa of the university's sociology department as "anti-Islam."

The protest rally organised by general students took place at the foot of the Raju Memorial Sculpture at Dhaka University.

Referring to her significant contributions to the student movement, they argued that such baseless labelling hinders efforts to create a non-discriminatory and just Bangladesh.

The protest followed the recent cancellation of a textbook revision committee by the Ministry of Education after objections from certain religious organisations regarding two of its members.

Civil admin runs slow

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The vital committee, headed by the cabinet secretary, typically convenes twice a month, but has not met even once after the interim government took charge.

As a result, proposals from several ministries are pending, according to officials familiar with the matter.

Cabinet Secretary Mahub Hossain is refraining from convening a meeting to avoid an "awkward situation" as some of his senior officers have been appointed as secretaries on a contractual basis, the official said.

"In fact, he has been referring important decision-making to the secretaries who were his seniors – this has disrupted the hierarchy of the administration," said one of the officials.

Mahub could not be reached for comment.

"If the secretaries are not being told that they must work without fear, there will be no speed in the administration," said Badiur Rahman, a former secretary and chairman of the National Board of Revenue.

Without the assurance and clear messaging from the top, a dynamic administration would not materialise, he added.

The changes of divisional and deputy commissioners has also exposed the lack of clarity in the interim government's decision-making process.

While the divisional commissioners

for two divisions were transferred, their replacements are yet to be announced. Another six divisional commissioners are expected to be transferred immediately, so they are unwilling to take any decisive actions.

On September 9, new DCs were appointed across 25 districts, with additional appointments made in 34 more districts on September 10.

However, a group of officials expressed dissatisfaction over the appointments and demanded the cancellation of the gazette notification announcing the new DCs.

On September 10, the protest escalated into a physical altercation in front of the ministry of public administration, which lasted for more than three hours.

In response to the incident, eight DC appointments were revoked and the joint secretary (field administration) of the public administration ministry was transferred.

A probe committee recommended disciplinary action against 17 deputy secretaries involved in the scuffle: severe punishment for eight, minor penalty for four and reprimand for five. The names of the offending deputy secretaries were not disclosed.

"Maybe the government is moving slowly regarding the matter as there is a huge criticism surrounding the promotion of officials to positions such as deputy secretary, joint secretary and additional secretary,"

said retired secretary Awal Majumder. Another secretary cautioned against making rapid changes in key positions, citing the challenges faced during the recent DC appointments.

While some partisan officials did take advantage in the case of appointment of secretary, DC or organ chief during party-led government, most positions are filled by professional officers.

The government will reap benefits if it runs the administration with honest and skilled officers deducting the partisan officials, the secretary said on the condition of anonymity.

"I can assure you that those with questionable records will not remain in the administration," said Mokhles ur Rahman, senior secretary to the public administration ministry.

He said the administration will regain momentum soon.

Asked about the absence of smooth operation of administration, Ali Imam Majumder, special assistant to the chief adviser, said: "We are working to pull the country out of the rubble and such efforts take time.

"We should not consider this government a caretaker government. We have to keep in mind that there was no government in the country for the few days before we took office. There is no scope to underestimate the urgency that has come from such a situation in the administration," said Majumder, also a former cabinet secretary.

Rohingya crises, he added. The Malaysia-Bangladesh bilateral trade is worth over \$2 billion, which is heavily tilted towards Malaysia. "We will see how to increase our export to Malaysia," the official said.

Chief Adviser Yunus and Malaysian premier Anwar spoke on August 13 over the phone. During that call, Anwar said his country is ready to help and support Bangladesh's interim government in restoring peace and ensuring security.

Anwar said that Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has long-standing good ties with Malaysia.

Govt will now talk to the parties first

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the advisers about the matter.

In his address to the nation on September 11, Prof Yunus announced the formation of the commissions to reform the judiciary, the election system, the administration, the police, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the constitution.

Shahdeen Malik was named the head of the Constitutional Reform Commission; Justice Shah Abu Naim Mominur Rahman the Judicial Reform Commission; Badiul Alam Majumdar the Election System Reform Commission; Abdul Mueed Chowdhury the Public Administration Reform Commission; Safar Raj Hossain the Police Administration Reform Commission; and Iftekharuzzaman the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission. Supreme Court lawyer Malik was later replaced with Professor Ali Riaz as the head of the Constitutional Reform Commission.

The Daily Star contacted the heads of two reform commissions, who talked to this newspaper on the condition of anonymity.

One mentioned that no government notification on the reform commissions, except for the appointment of Prof Ali Riaz, has yet been issued.

The other commission head noted that not all the members of the commissions have been picked up.

The six commissions' terms of reference have not been fixed either, he added.

He hoped these jobs will be completed soon so they can start

working properly.

In his address to the nation, Yunus said the reforms aim to build a state system based on public ownership, accountability, and welfare. He added that the establishment of a fair electoral system and good governance is at the core of these reforms.

The chief adviser said the commissions were expected to formally start their work on October 1 and finish their jobs within three months.

He also said the government would organise discussions with major political parties in the next phase. At the final stage, a comprehensive consultation would be held for three to seven days with representatives of student bodies, civil society, political parties, and the government.

In a meeting with Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, in the US on September 24, Yunus said the government would hold discussions with the political parties on the recommendations of the commissions.

Once a consensus on the reforms is reached and the voter list is prepared, the date for the election will be announced, he added.

At the press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy, a reporter asked if the world leaders had enquired about the tenure of the interim administration during Yunus's US visit.

Shafiqul said no such discussion was held. "They know that the government has taken steps of major reforms, and it will take time."

RMG worker shot dead

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express solidarity. A few other factory workers also joined there. At that time, the members of the joint forces started charging batons and firing at the workers."

Kawsar, along with other injured, was rushed to Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar where doctors declared him dead on arrival around 1:00pm.

Enamul Haque, a physician at the hospital, told The Daily Star, "He [Kawsar] had a bullet wound on his lower abdomen while two others were shot in the chest."

One of the injured was moved to the ICU, he said.

Mango Tex worker Ekramul Haque, who took them to the hospital, told The Daily Star that employees of Mondol Group were protesting. "Our factory is opposite to Mondol Group's. As we were heading home after work, law enforcers started firing at us," he said.

The workers clashed with police, industrial police, Rab, and army personnel.

Additional DIG of Dhaka Range Mostafizur Rahman was present at the spot, our Savar correspondent reports.

The Daily Star tried to reach him for comments but failed despite repeated attempts.

Jewel Miah, officer-in-charge of Savar Model Police Station, told The Daily Star that Kawsar's body was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

A senior official of Ashulia Industrial Police, wishing anonymity, said, "It is a sensitive issue, I don't want to say anything. I don't know who opened fire."

The officer said seven members of industrial police were injured during the clash. The injured include Ashulia Industrial Police SP Md Sarwar Alam, who was hit on the head by a brick

chunk hurled by the protesters.

This paper last night called two officials of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) for comments, but they did not pick up the phone.

At least 20 factories in the area were shut yesterday due to the violence.

WHY THE UNREST

Workers' union leaders have been complaining that the workers unrest continued because a handful of factories failed to implement their 18-point demand that was accepted in a tripartite meeting on September 24. They said some factories were yet to pay the workers' arrears and some were not paying the Tk 225 attendance bonus and Tk 10 for tiffin.

A group of union leaders at a meeting, organised by the labour and employment ministry on Sunday night, held broken promises responsible for the latest spell of agitation in the garment manufacturing belts.

They called for an immediate implementation of their 18-point demand.

The leaders also underscored unresolved issues, like non-withdrawal of cases against workers, and workers being abused.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, legal affairs secretary of Bangladesh Garment and Sweater Sramik Trade Union Kendra, told The Daily Star that the BGMEA and the factory owners agreeing to workers' demands had calmed the industrial belt.

"My question is why Mondol Group's problem was not discussed at the BGMEA. I am not protesting against charging truncheons on workers or throwing teargas canisters at them. But why bullets were used? If the workers are still shot dead then what is the change?"

He held the government, the BGMEA, and the factory owners responsible for the killing and demanded a thorough probe.

Army chief General Waker-uz-Zaman in a recent interview with Reuters said that he will help the government complete the reforms so that elections could be held within the next 18 months.

Shafiqul said the news agency "paraphrased" General Zaman's comments. "The people of the country will decide the time frame," the chief adviser's press secretary said.

ROCK STAR-LIKE RECEPTION AT UN'

Shafiqul said that Yunus's visit to the US to attend the United Nations General Assembly was "successful and historic".

The head of government in the past two to three decades usually met with two to three regional leaders on the sidelines of the UNGA, but Nobel laureate Yunus held 50 meetings, according to Shafiqul. These included 12 with top global leaders like US President Joe Biden.

"Actually, Yunus was given a rock star-like reception. At the UN Headquarters, whenever he moved, a top leader would spread their arms and hug him. I would say it's a milestone for Bangladesh," he said.

Almost all world leaders said that they support the interim government and want to work with it, Shafiqul said.

Asked why there was no meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Yunus's US visit, Shafiqul said that the foreign adviser had talked about the issue earlier.

Deputy press secretaries Azad Majumder and Apurba Jahangir were also present at the press briefing.

Meanwhile, workers of Birds Group in the Ashulia industrial area blocked the Nabinagar Chandra highway yesterday morning, demanding arrears and reopening of the factory. The blockade was still in place when this report was filed at 11:00pm yesterday.

BGMEA'S SAY Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in a statement expressed sadness at the death of Kawsar and gave Tk 5 lakh to his family as an immediate financial assistance.

BGMEA acting president Abdullah Hil Rakib, during a press conference at the BGMEA office yesterday, sought greater safety for garment factories.

Rakib said despite meeting the 18-point demand, factory owners cannot keep their units operational due to workers' demonstrations, which often spreads from one factory to another.

He claimed that the workers were taking advantage of a weak law and order.

At the press conference, affected factory owners said their units were vandalised, looted, and torched. They said they lost \$4.8 lakh due to factory closures.

A few factory owners said they could not run their factories for 26 days last month and buyers were putting pressure on them for timely shipment.

Nazmul Kabir, managing director of AR Jeans, said workers were about to torch his factory on Sunday evening but law enforcers were able to stop them. He said he had goods worth Tk 200 crore in the factory then.

He did not open his factory yesterday fearing further unrest.

Kamran Sadique, director of MBM, said profit margins have plummeted to the lowest level ever because of buyers' insistence on low prices.

Malaysia PM likely to fly in October 4

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and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus," the diplomat said.

During the talks, Bangladesh is likely to raise the issues of increasing export to Malaysia, welfare of Bangladeshi migrants, and membership of ASEAN.

The Malaysian side may discuss the signing of a Free Trade Agreement and promoting digital economy and halal food.

"The two countries are not likely to have elaborate discussions this time. We are planning a joint commission meeting at the foreign minister level

soon to advance our talks on the priority issues," said another foreign ministry official.

Malaysia now hosts about 800,000 Bangladeshi workers, but there are allegations of syndicates' involvement in the recruitment of workers.

"This issue is expected to be discussed with importance," the official said.

As Malaysia will be the next chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), it can play an important role in addressing the Myanmar and the