

Reforms needed in forces too

Say former army officers at press briefing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former army officers yesterday held a press conference and claimed that there was a culture of impunity prevailing within the disciplined forces and demanded reforms.

Gathering at the Eagle Hall of the Retired Army Officers' Welfare Association building, the officers spoke about the abuse faced by victims of enforced disappearance, secret detention cells, indiscriminate raids and detention, unjust job terminations, the lack of due process and democratic rights in court-martials, and the use of the army to serve political interests.

"Over 287 applications have been submitted to the Chief Adviser's Office by former army officers claiming that they have faced injustice while in service," said Brig Gen (ret'd) Mohammad Hasan Nasir, former director of Army Headquarters and a member of the national investigation commission which was formed after the 2009 BDR mutiny. "At least 30 more applications are still pending, which will all be duly submitted."

The speakers urged governments to stop using the army and its intelligence wings as a tool to serve political purposes.

Navy Commander (ret'd) Nesar Ahmed Julias said that
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Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at a dialogue with a BNP delegation at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PTI

Hasina's former principal secy Azad arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested Abul Kalam Azad, former lawmaker and former principal secretary of ousted premier Sheikh Hasina, from the capital's Kalabagan yesterday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Additional Commissioner (DB) Rezaul Karim Mallik confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

Detectives arrested him from his place of hiding in the capital, where he had been staying since the fall of the Awami League government, the DB chief said without providing details.

Abul Kalam Azad was wanted in a number of cases as he was reportedly involved in various misdeeds during the Awami League regime.



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Govt must use stronger voice against violence

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"Despite having so many resources, why is it taking the government so long to prepare the list? The government must prepare it immediately and should take responsibility for the families of the deceased rather than just handing over a token sum of money."

About the price hike, Muhammad said: "The situation is the same as it was under the previous government. Why does the government have no control over price regulation? Everyone I talk to says nothing has changed - everything remains the same as before."

Human rights activist Maha Mirza presented a 13-point proposal outlining immediate actions for the interim government.

These include publishing a list of those martyred, killed and injured in the July uprising; taking responsibility for their families; and putting on trial everyone involved in the killings, including former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, former ministers, MPs, bureaucrats, police and party members.

The proposals also call for publishing a democratic constitution outline and finalising it based on public opinion.

The mob justice and lynching must be stopped immediately, while steps must be taken to prevent attacks on religious institutions such as temples, shrines, mosques and artwork.

The safety of the lives and property and the rights of hill and plain land people must be ensured.

Implementing the 13 demands is not particularly difficult, Muhammad said, adding that the proposal would be submitted to the interim government.

The interim government is not a revolutionary government and has limitations in its mandate, said Mujahidul Islam Selim, the former president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh.

"Its primary role is to pave the way for a return to a stable government through free elections. Before that, a convention should be held to amend the constitution, with the proposed amendments being prepared based on public opinion," he said.

Even after the July movement, women are still being attacked and labelled with various tags, said Samina Luthfa, associate professor of the University of Dhaka's sociology department.

She criticised the government for attempting to evade responsibility with conspiracy theories or excuses.

During the July movement, there was no question asked on who holds which ideology, said Rezwana Snigdha, professor at Jahangirnagar University's anthropology department.

"People from all backgrounds - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, hill people and madrasa students - protested together. Now, within two months, different labels are being applied," she said.

Ankon Chakma, president of the Pahari Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, said he went home only four times in the last 10 years.

"There has been no change in the hills. Even after the fall of fascism, I still couldn't go home," he said.

Since August 5, 60 to 70 shrines were destroyed, said Sufi philosopher Kazi Jaber Ahmed, adding that he was also attacked.

A life dedicated to public service

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Hospital, a medical facility he founded. He was 94.

He left behind his wife, son, two daughters, grandchildren, and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.

Badruddoza was admitted to the hospital on October 2 with lung infection. He had been suffering from ischemic heart disease, said his daughter Shaila Chowdhury.

Born on October 11, 1930, in Cumilla, Badruddoza lived a distinguished life as a specialist physician and senior politician.

At the request of the late president Ziaur Rahman, Badruddoza entered politics in 1978. He was made the founding secretary general of the BNP.

Hailing from Munshiganj district, he completed his Matriculation from St Gregory's School in Dhaka in 1947 and his HSC from Dhaka College in 1949.

In 1954-55, he obtained his MBBS from Dhaka Medical College, consistently ranking among the top students.

He was also a fellow of the Royal Colleges of Physicians (FRCP) of London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. He was awarded an honorary FCPS from Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons.

A leading professor of medicine, Badruddoza also earned fame as a presenter of TV programmes on medical issues. His BTV programme titled "Apar Doctor" was a must-watch show for the viewers.

Badruddoza addressed the United

Nations three times. A recipient of the Independence Award, he also authored several books.

The former president was first elected as an MP from Sreenagar of Munshiganj in 1979. After being elected again to parliament in 1991, he served as education minister. He later became the deputy leader of parliament.

In 1996, he served as the deputy leader of the opposition. He was re-elected to parliament in 2001. He then briefly served as the foreign minister of then BNP government from October to November that year.

On November 14, 2001, Badruddoza was elected as the president of Bangladesh. He stepped down on June 21 the following year after the BNP's parliamentary party, headed by then prime minister Khaleda Zia, asked him to quit, citing that lawmakers lost confidence in him.

The BNP rebuked him for not visiting the grave of party founder Ziaur Rahman on his death anniversary.

On May 8, 2004, Badruddoza founded Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, a political party, and served as its president until his passing.

CONDOLENCES
President Mohammed Shahabuddin, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, and leaders of different political parties in separate condolence messages yesterday expressed deep shock at the demise of Badruddoza.

In his message, the president said the death of Badruddoza is an

irreparable loss to the country's political arena.

Shahabuddin prayed for the eternal peace of his departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to his bereaved family.

Yunus in his message said that the nation has lost a distinguished public servant and a respected politician.

The chief adviser recalled Badruddoza's long and widely respected career as a physician and a public servant.

Yunus said the former president spread the message of well-being and sound health as an eminent doctor.

"He brought the same level of dedication when he joined politics. As a five-time member of parliament, he played a key role in the democratic transition of the country in the 90s. His speeches in parliament were hailed by politicians of all persuasions."

The chief adviser urged the people to learn from the late politician's life and dedicate themselves to the welfare of the people and democracy.

Badruddoza will be buried at his family graveyard at Majidpur in Munshiganj after Jhor prayers today.

Before his burial, his third namaz-e-janaza will be held at Srinagar Stadium at 10:00am today, said his Press Secretary Jahangir Alam.

Badruddoza's first and second namaz-e-janazas were held at Uttara Medical College for Women and Hospital and Baitul Atique Jame Mosque at the capital's Baridhara diplomatic zone.

Flash floods ravage Sherpur, M'singh

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The bodies of siblings Hatem and Alamgir, who went missing on Friday, were recovered around half a kilometer away from their home in Abhinagar village of Nalitabari upazila around 6:00pm yesterday, Sanowar Hossain, OC of Nalitabari Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Mahua Khatun of Namabatkhuchi village has been missing since Friday night, the OC added.

Flash floods have marooned around one lakh people in Sherpur's Sadar, Jhenaigati, Nalitabari and Sreebordi upazilas, according to data of the district administration.

"Water entered my home on Friday afternoon, and we are now surviving on dry food," said Achia Khatun, a resident of Ghazirkhamar village under Sherpur Sadar upazila.

Aman paddy on around 25,000 hectares and vegetables on around 1,000 hectares have gone under water, affecting more than 65,000 farmers, said the district agriculture officer.

"I planted Aman on around six bighas, and now all of it is underwater," said Matin Mia, a farmer from Sherpur Sadar upazila's Ghazaria area.

New criminals extorting people, businesses now

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The speakers have also mentioned that various organs of the state have somehow been associated with corruption, he added.

"Those who are supposed to enact and enforce laws have got involved in corruption in one way or the other. Those wearing uniforms have also got involved in graft. From this, we can realise the extent of the problem that we are dealing with socially."

Debapriya, also the chairman of the committee for the preparation of the white paper, said every citizen should participate in the process to change such a situation.

"We cannot expect that someone will do this job for us. We must realise our civic facilities ourselves. For this,

Fish from around 800 ponds has been washed away, according to the upazila fisheries office.

Torofdar Mahmudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Sherpur, said they were working to evacuate flood victims and distribute relief.

In Mymensingh, flash floods have stranded over 1.25 lakh people in Dhobaura and Halaughat upazilas, according to data of the district administration.

"My house has been destroyed by floodwaters. I'm homeless now. I have taken shelter at a relative's home," said Arif Mondol, a farmer from Dakshin Maizpara village.

Aman paddy on 4,000 hectares and vegetables on some 300 hectares have been submerged in Dhobaura. Besides, Aman on 7,600 hectares and vegetables on 38 hectares have been affected by flash floods in Halaughat, said the local agriculture officers.

In Noakhali, eight upazilas were hit by massive flooding in August and September, with many areas still waterlogged. The situation has deteriorated over the last two days due to heavy rain.

A bulletin of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre yesterday said the overall flood situation in the low-

lying areas of Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrokona and Mymensingh districts may remain unchanged until 9:00am today.

Afruz Sultana, assistant meteorologist of Bangladesh Meteorological Department, yesterday told The Daily Star that rain might continue across the country until October 12 due to the active monsoon.

The rivers in Mymensingh may continue to swell due to heavy rain and onrush of water from upstream, said Md Akhlak Ul Jamil, executive engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Mymensingh.

Rapid rise in the water levels of the Bhogai and the Chellakhali rivers is leading to deterioration of the flood situation, said Md Nakibuzzaman Khan, executive engineer of BWDB in Sherpur.

The Bhogai was flowing 51cm above the danger level at Sherpur's Nalitabari at 6:00pm yesterday, while the Chellakhali was 185cm above the danger level at Natkuchi in the same upazila, he added.

[Our correspondents from Mymensingh and Jamalpur contributed to this report.]

Not sure

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Trump was impeached in 2021 for inciting the insurrection after hundreds of his supporters - exhorted by the defeated Republican to "fight like hell" - battered police as they smashed windows at the Capitol and broke through doors.

He has been indicted over what prosecutors allege was a "private criminal effort" to subvert the election that culminated in the violence.

Trump - who is due to return to the venue of his first assassination bid in Butler, Pennsylvania on Saturday - has long been assailed over his violent rhetoric.

Biden made his comments during what was the first appearance of his presidency in the White House briefing room, where he touted his administration's achievements as his vice president, Kamala Harris, battles Trump.

Political parties

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new deputy commissioners facing allegations should be cancelled."

BNP urged the interim government to take action against those trying to create anarchy in the Chattoagram Hill Tracts.

"Some Hindu people, ahead of the Durga Puja, are spreading propaganda that the Hindu community is being attacked. It is absolutely false and it is a conspiracy against Bangladesh. We have asked the interim government to consider these issues very seriously."

Interim government previously said the focus of the dialogue would be to learn how political parties could cooperate with the six reform commissions. Besides, discussions would cover the state of law, order and Puja.

JAMAAT WANTS TWO ROAD MAPS
Jamaat-e-Islami wants a road map to reforms and another to the next election, said its Ameer Shafiqur Rahman.

"If reforms are successful then the election will be successful. We hope the government will remain impartial and hold a free and fair election," he said.

People who face charges of killing, money laundering, and being involved in enforced disappearance, should be punished, he said.

Jamaat hopes the interim government will not unnecessarily prolong its stay in power, he said.

Regarding concerns over law and order during Puja, Shafiqur said, "If the law enforcers and people work together, we hope people of Hindu community will be able to hold a remarkable Durga Puja this year."

Jamaat will unveil its detailed reform plan on October 9, he said.

LEFT ALLIANCES

Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said, "If there is delay [before election], evil forces may do something."

The left parties demanded urgent

government steps to control the prices of essentials and establish law and order.

"The Liberation War cannot be turned into something controversial. Democratic rights are being snatched away by banning student politics in universities while communal forces are getting advantages. This cannot go on," he said.

Nagarik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna said, "We see some weaknesses, failures, and limitations of the administration."

Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim said he proposed forming nine more reform commissions.

The chief adviser also held dialogues with leaders of Amar Bangladesh Party, two factions of Gono Odhikar Parishad, and Hefajat-e-Islam.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam told a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy that Prof Yunus informed the parties that reform commissions will consult the political parties, other stakeholders before filing their reports in three months.

After receiving the reports, the interim government will meet the parties again to reach a consensus regarding the reforms. The timeline will depend on that consensus, he added.

Preparations for election and formation of the EC will be done in the meantime an election can be held as soon as the consensus is reached, he said.

Mahfuz Alam, special assistant to the chief adviser, said the government would hopefully break the cartels responsible for higher commodity prices.

Government officials who assisted the fascist regime will be brought to justice, he added.

Asked whether Sheikh Hasina would face trial, Mahfuz said government agencies were working to bring all perpetrators to book.

A chance to root out graft

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The problem, however, was a lack of transparency and the involvement of vested quarters close to both the governments when the MoU was signed in 2021.

Malaysia had the discretion in selecting the Bangladeshi recruitment agencies, and the criteria for selecting the 101 agencies were not known.

Studies found that the recruitment cost for each migrant was between US \$4,500 and \$6,000 and that many fraud companies got Malaysia's approval for hiring Bangladeshi workers.

The Malaysian authorities managed the recruitment process through the web-based Foreign Workers Centralised Management System (FWCMS) - a tool for manipulation - operated by controversial company Bestinet.

According to migrant rights activists, between 100,000 to 200,000 Bangladeshis remain jobless or underpaid there and at least 96 percent of them face risks of exploitation due to recruitment debt, said the US-based non-profit Verite in a study.

The Socialist Party of Malaysia's Migrant Desk Coordinator Mohana Rani Rasiah said the condition of the Bangladeshi migrants, especially those who went there since August 2022, is "horrible".

"A lot of these workers don't have jobs. Their rights to proper accommodation, food and decent work are being violated," she told this correspondent over phone from Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Anwar Ibrahim and Prof Yunus, at the meeting on Friday, discussed the issues. Anwar Ibrahim underscored the importance of ensuring decent work conditions and said they were reviewing the entire recruitment process to ensure transparency and accountability.

He, however, did not clarify if the syndicate of 101 agents would be dismantled and if FWCMS would be replaced, but added, "We need workers. But they cannot be treated as modern slaves." He did not elaborate on how he

would ensure that.

Prof Abar called for the dismantling of the syndicate and making the recruitment business competitive. "For that, the MoU signed in 2021 needs to be reviewed. Previously too, certain quarters created cartels to manipulate recruitment in Malaysia."

He added that the Malaysian government needs to ensure that the jobs offered by the Malaysian employers are genuine.

Mohana Rani said it is extremely difficult for the vulnerable migrants to file regular cases with the Labour Department and have their problems addressed. There were many times employers threatened the workers to withdraw complaints if they filed any.

"The Malaysian labour department should create a special mechanism to address the workers' complaints."

Prof Abar said the Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia should revamp its manpower and logistics to facilitate the redress of the migrants' complaints. "Holding employers accountable can help address much of the problem."

Speaking to Anwar Ibrahim, Prof Yunus said, "We're moving towards a new Bangladesh, which will make us proud."

Anwar Ibrahim expressed his support to the interim government's efforts to "bring Bangladesh's economic trajectory back on track".

Prof Abar and Mohana Rani both said Dhaka needs to hold a strong position on protecting the rights of migrant workers.

Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur can significantly boost their relationship in trade and investment, with the former creating a conducive environment for Malaysian investors and increasing exports there, Prof Abar said.

The bilateral trade between the two countries is worth \$2.78 billion, with Bangladesh exporting worth only over 300 million.

"Anwar Ibrahim's visit has created a new opportunity and we should best utilise it," he added.