

Ex-DMP DC Jasim first before ICT

Chief prosecutor seeks secure access to digital evidence, security for tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time, a person accused of committing crimes against humanity during the student-led mass uprising was produced before the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) yesterday, starting the process of holding the suspects accountable.

Jasim Uddin Mollah, former deputy commissioner of Mirpur division, stands accused in a genocide case linked to the July-August crackdown on the protesters.

The three-judge ICT panel, led by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder, approved the prosecution's plea to show Jasim arrested in the case and sent him to jail.

Chief Prosecutor Muhammad Tajul Islam made the plea before

the court, while prosecutors Gazi Monwar Hossain Tamim, BM Sultan Mahmud, and Abdullah Al Noman were present during the hearing.



Jasim Uddin Mollah

No defence lawyer appeared for Jasim during the hearing.

After the hearing, Tajul told reporters that arrest warrants for 17 individuals, including Jasim, were issued on October 27, and based on that warrant, police arrested him and produced him before the court.

"He [Jasim] had jurisdiction over seven police stations in Mirpur where police shot and killed hundreds of students. Various atrocities were committed. Evidence of his involvement in the atrocities in the Mirpur area has been found."

He added that so far 35 cases have been filed with different police

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Visiting UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Turk calls on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Russia captures village in Ukraine's northeast

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it had captured the village of Krugliakivka in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, where it has been stepping up pressure on Kyiv's forces for months.

The village was home to around 1,200 people before the conflict and lies around 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Kupiansk, an embattled Ukrainian stronghold that Moscow has been trying to surround.

Russian army units "liberated the settlement of Krugliakivka in the Kharkiv region," the defence ministry said in a daily briefing, using a Russian name for the village.

Kyiv forced Russian troops away from Kupiansk and much of the Kharkiv region in late 2022, but the Kremlin is pushing back again, pressing its advantage against overstretched and exhausted Ukrainian soldiers.

Moscow advanced 478 square kilometres (185 square miles) in Ukraine during October alone – a record since March 2022 – according to an AFP analysis of data from the American Institute for the Study of War.

Shift focus

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committee to constitute the Election Commission. "Although we do not think this is a major issue, as we hope the committee will fulfil its responsibilities properly, we expected that they (government) would consult political parties before forming it," he said.

The BNP leader hoped that the new commission would arrange the election promptly.

Since the recently resigned Election Commission, led by Kazi Habiburul Awal, arranged the election in three months, the new commission should be able to do the same, he said. "It is certainly possible if there is the will to make it happen."

Fakhru said his party believed this government had no political agenda, as Prof Yunus had clearly indicated that he had no political ambitions.

"I want to say to Dr Muhammad Yunus that you are highly respected worldwide, and the people of Bangladesh deeply love and respect you. They want that to continue. My request is that you stay vigilant to ensure your position is not undermined," he said.

Fakhru said the nation is facing a critical time, pointing out that the struggle for democracy continues amid various plots.

He warned that the state would be in great danger if any imprudent actions were taken or mistakes were made out of mere emotion, as many efforts are being made to threaten the nation's existence. "We must remember these words."

He observed that everyone must remain vigilant, as "the fascists are still active". "Merely changing an individual cannot alter the entire structure of fascism."

He said the youth brought change to the country through a bloody struggle and immense sacrifices. "It's also their responsibility to maintain it ... we have to resolve many problems we have."

Stating that the interim government is non-political, the BNP leader said it had come forward to help the nation. "But politicians have to resolve the problems, and no problem can be solved without politicians."

Fakhru thanked the government for forming several commissions for state reforms. "We hope the government will take the reports from the reform commissions, present them to the people, and take it forward. I want to make one thing clear: all reforms must be ratified by the people and accepted by them."

He warned that reforms would never be sustainable without people's participation. He emphasised that success cannot be achieved by imposing reforms from above. "Ayub Khan tried, Ershad tried, but it was not possible. Nothing can be done that conflicts with our country and the culture of the people."

Stray bullet

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shot and the criminals fled immediately, the witness said.

Mirpur Division Police officials rushed to the spot and recovered the body. They then sent it to a hospital for autopsy.

In another incident yesterday afternoon, a man with a criminal record was beaten to death by locals in Dhaka's Sabujbagh area.

The deceased was identified as Ramzan, 35.

Yasin Ali, officer in charge of Sabujbagh Police Station, told The Daily Star that locals apprehended Ramzan in Baikhya area around 4:45pm and beat him to death.

"He had several cases filed against him," he said, adding that people got hold of him as soon as he entered the area.

Police sources said Ramzan was arrested a few months ago with firearms and was released on bail after the fall of the Hasina-led government.

He had around a dozen cases filed against him for illegal arms possession, drug dealing, robbery, and gun violence. He was known to be an active criminal in the capital's Khilgaon, Bashabo, Sabujbagh, Mugda, and Madartek areas.

A police team visited the scene and recovered the body. It was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Police grapple with rising crimes in city

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Meanwhile, the number of mugging incidents saw a sharp rise, with 14 cases filed in September compared to only four the month before. Incidents of theft followed a similar trend – 14 cases were reported in August, while 33 in September.

Responding to a query about the state of public safety, Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad Majumder, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser, at a press briefing yesterday said the government is working to restore law and order, prevent crimes and ensure thorough investigations and justice for the incidents that have occurred.

"The law enforcement agencies will take all necessary measures to address these incidents..."

Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, said, "Criminals are capitalising on the police's weakened morale, a result of the unrest following the July movement. Also, the law enforcers' hesitation in taking swift decisions, fearing backlash or adverse reactions, is worsening the situation."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Md Masud Alam, deputy commissioner of Ramna Division Police, however, said, "We have already increased vigilance and patrol to ensure visible policing and prompt action."

Around 4:00am on Monday, at least 15 to 20 young men stopped two brothers – Md Adnan, 24, and Md Siam, 22 – while they were passing by Abul Hotel in the capital's Rampura on a motorbike. The goons beat the two with iron rods, hacked them with a machete and took away Tk 15,000 from them, sources said.

Just the day before, around four muggers attacked Ashik, a mason, at the

Kalshi bus stop in Pallabi around 7:00pm. They stabbed him in the back with a knife and took away his cash and cellphone.

Amid rising criminal activities, residents of Mohammadpur, including students, demonstrated in front of the Mohammadpur Police Station on Saturday, demanding that security be stepped up immediately.

Following that, a joint operation was launched by the army, police and Rab between October 26 and 29, in which around 108 suspects were nabbed for involvement in mugging, robbery and murder incidents in the area.

On Tuesday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) issued a statement saying the army has been working with impartiality and professionalism to ensure overall security of public life and important government installations, maintain law and order, prevent extrajudicial activities, and uphold the rule of law.

Inspector General of Police Md Mainul Islam has directed all unit heads to strengthen ongoing special drives against various crimes – robbery, extortion, drug trafficking, and other illegal activities – being committed by the infamous "kishore [teenager] gangs".

He issued the directive in a special message on Monday, according to a PHQ press release.

Lt Col Md Munim Ferdous, director of the legal and media wing of Rab, told The Daily Star, "We've already started identifying the crime hot spots and increased patrolling and checkpoints there."

"We are also making a list of the notorious criminals and muggers, and keeping them under surveillance," he said, adding that they have arrested 25

muggers and 33 robbers just this month.

According to Rab's database, it has arrested 215 murder suspects from August 5 to October 29. Another 352 people were arrested on suspicion of being involved in sabotage.

Locals of different areas in the capital said thin police presence was one of the major reasons behind the rise in criminal activities.

During visits to many of these places, this correspondent found that police patrols and surveillance have not yet come back to normal, resulting in such incidents taking place one after the other.

On Tuesday night, Hasan Hawlader, 22, a human hauler driver, was fatally stabbed, while Nure Alam, 23, another driver, was left injured allegedly for speaking out against extortion in the capital's Rampura.

Earlier around 3:30pm on Sunday, Farah Diba, 60, wife of a retired air force officer, was killed in their residence in the capital's Mirpur DOHS, allegedly by robbers who reportedly took away Tk 15 lakh cash and 10 bhori gold.

Addressing the current situation, Enamul Haque Sagor, assistant inspector general of Police Headquarters, told this correspondent, "A special drive has been underway since October 18 to maintain law and order, and an instruction has already been issued on Monday to strengthen the drive."

As of October 27, over 200 robbers, extortionists, and criminals have been arrested across the country through the drive.

"There were some problems and the police force faced a lot of challenges after August 5. We're now working in full swing and trying our best. Hopefully, [the situation] will improve soon."

Map out economic priorities

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Uncertainty in economic policy direction over the short, medium and long terms is likely to make investors "very cautious and conservative", Ahmed said.

Such uncertainty will lead them to take a wait-and-see approach and delay investment decisions, he said in the interview on October 23.

On the other hand, if the government remains firm in its commitment to building a better business environment, it will help reduce uncertainty in policy directions and encourage new ventures, according to the DCCI chief.

"Confidence in the government's commitment to building a better business environment is a pre-condition for sustainable investment and economic growth."

EDUCATION AND JOBS

Ahmed said the country saw rapid growth in the economy as well as in the education sector in the last decades.

"Our numbers are our biggest strength, but it cannot be put to effective use unless we create the right environment and can invest in it."

Every year lakhs of new graduates enter the job market, but finding the right jobs for them has emerged as a major challenge, Ahmed pointed out.

A recent World Bank study says that overall unemployment is about 5 percent, which is an acceptable level. But nearly a third of those who graduated in recent years have remained unemployed, which is too high.

The DCCI chief said the current education programmes are not based on demand for skills, but focuses on a traditional system that does not change

with the industry's demand.

A vast majority of graduates study liberal arts, where skills are not employable. As a result, jobseekers are not getting offers for the skills they have, he said.

Youths with tertiary (post-secondary) education are needed in larger numbers for the service sector, which is already the largest contributor to the economy. But the country has not yet been able to become a large service exporter, except in the freelancer segment of the ICT industry, according to Ahmed.

"We possibly need to focus on building a skill based education system to compete with the others, especially in areas with opportunities such as accounting and IT," the DCCI president said.

In the short term, he suggested expanding the post-graduate diploma and training or introducing supplementary courses in tertiary education with the focus on job skills.

CHALLENGES

Ahmed sees many challenges ahead for the private sector, but pointed out three key areas that require immediate attention – law and order, energy and finance.

First, the law and order situation, which has improved significantly, is still a major concern. Order and discipline, especially in the industrial areas, is important to maintain production capacity and proper functioning of the industrial ecosystem, Ahmed said.

"The ability of businesses to continue operations uninterrupted is critical to achieve growth targets," he said.

Secondly, concerns over gas supply are

impacting industrial production heavily, according to him. "If energy supply is not ensured, production will be hampered."

"If we have to use alternatives like diesel, the cost becomes exorbitant even when it is available. When costs increase, demand and sales fall because of high prices."

The third challenge is finance, as interest rates have increased to an "almost unsustainable level" of around 15 percent for the smaller businesses in the past few months, Ahmed said.

"This has tightened credit flow to SMEs. When interest rates rise, investment falls."

He said private sector growth depends on policy support, incentives, and infrastructure services. If these are ensured efficiently, the country will have a better business environment, according to him.

"The bottleneck is created mostly by procedures, regulations, and duplication of a paper-based system where the government machinery operates on the basis of, in some cases, century-old laws."

Ahmed criticised the central bank's conservative monetary policy, which focuses on raising interest rates to reduce demand and contain inflation.

This is effective in the short term, but in the long run, this will damage production capacity, according to him.

To control inflation, he suggested other measures such as a contractionary fiscal policy, and reduction of budget deficit and import duty.

"These may reduce government revenue, but will eventually bring relief to the common people," Ahmed said.

said it is a matter of political consensus, and a decision would be taken after consultation with them.

The government-formed investigation committee found that the recent report of Dainik Kalbela on the allegations of bribery in the appointment of deputy commissioners was not true, said Abul Kalam Azad Majumder, another DPS to the chief adviser.

Dainik Kalbela will be asked to review its report and take necessary measures, he added.

All killings, rights abuses

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Yunus, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, Army Chief General Waker-Uz Zaman, advisers, civil society members, UN officials, diplomats and Dhaka University students who took part in the July protests.

At least 1,695 murder cases, including 75 against high profile politicians and businesspeople linked to the Awami League, have been filed since the formation of the interim government on August 8.

Many of the cases were filed under the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Act, which has a provision of death penalty.

During his meetings with the advisers, Turk said there were issues in the ICT law that needed compliance with international human rights standards.

"Killings, all killings need to be investigated. That's what human rights demand, because we cannot allow killings to happen with impunity," Turk said.

Bangladesh needs to establish justice, truth and reconciliation, he said, adding that he was visiting the country to see how his office could provide support to the government during the transition process.

About the government decision that no cases would be filed against people who worked to make the mass uprising a success, he said killings should be properly investigated irrespective of the identity of the perpetrators.

Referring to the large number of cases, he said, "We cannot have the filing of cases on charges that are not properly done and it is therefore extremely important to resolve this and there is a commission set up precisely to address this issue."

"It is important in such a period that we don't repeat the past, that justice is properly served ... which means cases are properly investigated and charges are brought against precisely those who have committed crimes and they are also entitled to fair trial."

About the ban on Bangladesh Chhatra League under the anti-terrorism law, he said, "The world has seen the consequences of the so-called global anti-terrorism campaign ... Often, people who opposed the authorities were labelled as terrorists."

"We often see labelling of the terrorists to stifle the dissent. It is important to learn lessons from this country in the way terrorism label was used to stifle the dissent."

No place for Hasina

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controlled the institutions to enhance their interest," he added. "No fascist party should be in existence in a democratic system."

Yunus speculated that the AL might disintegrate, but stressed that its fate would not be decided by his interim administration as it was "not a political government", according to the FT.

He told the newspaper that any decision on whether the AL could participate in a future election would be decided by a "consensus" of political parties themselves. "They have to decide their political space."

Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, a former MP and organising secretary of the AL, told the FT the party was "ready at any time to join the election".

Microcredit pioneer Yunus had previously been targeted by Hasina reportedly for his bid to join politics.

Yunus told the FT he had no intention of joining politics or forming a political party.

He also said he would not draw a timeline for the polls. "Our job is to get things settled and get a new reform agenda done," he said. "When the election preparation is done, we will consult with political parties."

Yunus said that the government would seek Hasina's return, but only after a verdict was reached by a domestic criminal tribunal that this month issued an arrest warrant against her and 45 others.

"She is charged with crimes against humanity...when the verdict comes out, we'll try to get her back through the extradition treaty" with India, he said.

The UN fact-finding mission is investigating the attacks on the minorities after August 5.

"Protection of minorities is absolutely key. It is part of the human rights framework. We need to ensure that the reported attacks against minorities are investigated."

"There is also a lot of misinformation and disinformation, which is [why it is] all the more important to go to the facts, to identify the perpetrators."

The situation in Bangladesh is unique and unprecedented, he said, adding that human rights and social justice are the core demands of the youth.

"Despite the grief and sense of loss, there is palpable hope that this time, through this transition, things will be different. Thus, this time, there must be justice, reforms must be sustainable and durable, so that the abusive practices of the last decades are not repeated."

He proposed setting up an office of the UN Human Rights Office here to support the transition and promote human rights in areas where reforms are being made.

After meeting Turk, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain told a press briefing that the government was examining the UN proposal to set up its office in Bangladesh.

Turk welcomed the steps to repeal the Cyber Security Act, and to withdraw old cases of speech crimes under this law and the Digital Security Act.

Women are at the heart of social justice movements, including the protests in July, and they must be at the forefront during the transition and beyond. The participation of ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous peoples is also crucial, he said.

The reform initiatives can be a powerful step towards easing decades of intense political division.

Criminal cases should not be filed against individuals solely on the basis of their previous political affiliations, Turk added.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said the UN fact-finding mission would finalise its report in the first week of December.

Turk urged the chief adviser to make the National Human Rights Commission independent and fully functional.

Prof Yunus said his government was committed to upholding the rights of every citizen.

"I don't think we have a case to do that before a verdict is done."

Hasina's son Sajeb Wazed Joy told the FT in August that allegations his mother was responsible for violence against protesters were false and she was ready to face any charges "because she did nothing illegal".

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has voiced concern about the safety of Bangladesh's minority Hindus since Yunus's government took over and many in New Delhi remain hostile to what they allege was a US-backed regime change, the FT wrote.

About 800 people, including protesters, bystanders, and police, were killed in the unrest, according to the health ministry. However, human rights groups have not confirmed allegations of mass atrocities against Hindus.

Yunus acknowledged "some incidents" of violence against Hindus and a "very small number" of fatalities. But he argued that they were targeted for their AL affiliation, not their religion.

"Most of the Hindus [attacked in August] supported the Awami League," he said, adding that critics had "transformed the narrative".

Yunus said the lack of support from New Delhi, to which Bangladesh is bound by power, water and other infrastructure projects as well as shared history, had "hurt" his government. He added that Modi would be "most welcome" to visit.

"We tried to...emphasise the fact that we are neighbours, we need each other, we must have the best relationship that any two neighbours should have," Yunus said.