

NHRC chairman, 5 members quit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Kamal Uddin Ahmed, along with the commission's five other members, resigned from their positions yesterday.

They submitted their resignations separately to President Mohammed Shahabuddin, citing section 6(4) of the National Human Rights Commission Act 2009.

Those who resigned include full-time member Selim Reza. The others are members Tania Haque, Biswajit Chanda, Kongjari Chowdhury, and Aminul Islam.

The president appointed Kamal as chairman of the commission for a three-year term on December 10, 2022, with a rank equivalent to a justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Kamal had previously served as a full-time member of the commission in an earlier term.

The commission was formed in December 2008 after the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2007 was promulgated with effect from September 1, 2008.



Kamal Uddin



A destroyed building in a neighbourhood of Beirut's southern suburbs after Israeli strikes. Hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces continued in Lebanon yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Delhi sees Hasina as a former PM

Says Indian foreign ministry spokesperson

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday said it considers Sheikh Hasina as a former prime minister of Bangladesh.

"We have repeatedly said that she [Hasina] is a former prime minister, that is where it stands," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told the weekly media briefing in New Delhi.

He made the remarks after an Indian journalist pointed out that the Awami League in its congratulatory statement to Donald Trump described Hasina as "Bangladesh PM". The journalist wanted to know if India considers Hasina a former PM or a "PM in exile".

On the recent events in Chattogram, he said "extremists" were behind the recent "attacks on Hindus and their properties". He urged the Bangladesh government to take action against the perpetrators and strong measures to ensure the safety of the minorities.

Jaiswal claimed there have been "incendiary" social media posts targeting the Hindus that triggered "the attacks" in Chittagong. "It is understood that extremists are behind the incidents," he added.

In Chattogram, police on Tuesday took a trader into custody after a mob attacked and vandalised his shop on Hazari Lane over a Facebook post.

The man allegedly made the post criticising ISKCON

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Party offices silent, abandoned

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polls held on January 7 are facing a completely different reality, with many of the offices found to be empty or padlocked.

The activists of the parties – six of which are members of the Awami League-led 14-party alliance – are avoiding public gatherings, fearing potential arrest and harassment.

Top leaders of many of the parties either went into hiding or have severely restricted outdoor movements. The Daily Star has learnt from people close to the individuals.

Their activities, in fact, are limited to issuing statements on various issues, they added.

The correspondent visited the central offices of 13 parties on four days late last month and found the central offices of five parties – Jatiya Party, Trinamool BNP, Bangladesh Nationalist Movement (BNM), National Awami Party, and Jatiya Party (JP) – padlocked.

Offices of Tariat Federation and Ganatantri Party do not exist now as their landlords rented the spaces out to others. The leaders of the parties have not turned up since August 5.

The headquarters of the immediate past ruling party Awami League on Bangabandhu Avenue now looks like an abandoned building.

With its entrance littered with ash, shattered glass, and charred wood. The building had been vandalised and torched on August 5 and later.

Last Sunday, makeshift cots used by street vendors were seen stacked against the main gate. Posters of Jamaat-e-Islami highlighting incidents of violence since October 28, 2008, and several Gono Odhikar Parishad posters now cover parts of the office walls.

No AL members returned to the building since August 5, according to nearby shopkeepers.

This correspondent could not contact any AL central leaders.

LOCKED OFFICES

The central office of the Jatiya Party, the opposition in parliament for three consecutive terms since 2014, in Kakrail was found locked around 4:30pm on October 27.

Insiders said the number of outdoor political programmes of the party dropped significantly since August 5 and most of the activities are indoors.

A few days later, on November 1, the building was set on fire and vandalised by a group of people marching under the banner of "Anti-fascist students, workers, and masses".

Abdur Rahman, president of Sramik Odhikar Parishad, an associate body of the Gono Odhikar Parishad, said activists of his party were marching with lit torches when some people from the Jatiya Party office building threw brick chunks at them from upstairs.

Contacted, Jatiya Party Secretary General Mujibul

Haque Chunnu said the central office was locked as all the leaders and activists were at the party chairmen's office in Banani.

He claimed that the number of the party's political programmes did not drop.

He, however, said that the party had organised one outdoor programme across the country to protest the filing of cases against its leaders.

"We are holding meetings with all affiliated organisations regularly," he added.

Trinamool BNP's central office at Meherba Plaza on Topkhana Road was found locked the same day. There was no signboard there either.

Locals said they hardly saw party activities there since August 5. The situation worsened after the arrest of party chairperson Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury on October 18, they said.

The party has ceased activities at the office for some days as its staff left, said Taimur Alam Khandaker, general secretary of Trinamool BNP.

He could not say for how long there have been no party activities.

"We will think about political programmes after analysing the situation and when political activities resume in the country," he said.

Central offices of the Bangladesh National Awami Party (NAP) in Dhanmondi and Jatiya Party (JP) in Lalmitia were found locked. Locals said the offices of the parties – components of the 14-party alliance – have been closed for many days.

"We open our party office from time to time due to the current political situation. Many activists were scattered and that's why political activities came to a halt," said Ivy Ahmed, president of NAP.

The main gate of the BNM's central office in Mohammadpur was found padlocked. The office is in a flat owned by party Chairman Shah Muhammad Abu Zafar.

Zafar said they have instructed all party leaders and activists to go to their localities.

"They visit the central office twice and thrice a week. We don't have any political programmes now. We are analysing the situation," he added.

The Supreme Party and BNM got registration with the Election Commission before the January polls, sparking criticism with many terming them "kings party".

"We are not a King's Party as we were critical of Awami League," Zafar said.

OFFICES DON'T EXIST

The central offices of two 14-party alliance components, Bangladesh Tariat Federation in Dhanmondi and Ganatantri Party in Purana Paltan, do not exist anymore.

Md Nuruzzaman, the caretaker of the building where Tariat's office was housed, said the party leaders left the office on August 5

with their documents.

He said the party activists paid the rent and did not come to the offices except to collect their belongings.

The phones of the party's chairman Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandary and Secretary General Syed Rezaul Haque Chandpur were unreachable.

Meanwhile, locals in Purana Paltan said no members of the Ganatantri Party went to its office housed in Israt Tower since August 5. The building owners leased the space out to a lawyer as the party did not pay rent for months.

The building authorities kept the party's belongings, including chairs and tables, stacked in a corner on the floor.

Enam Ali, manager of the building, said they could not settle financial issues with the Ganatantri Party as the leaders were unreachable.

Ganatantri Party President Arash Ali did not pick up his phone and its general secretary Shahadat Hossain's phone was unreachable.

ALMOST EMPTY

In mid-September, party men reopened the central office of the Workers Party of Bangladesh, which was vandalised. Workers Party is also a key member of the 14-party alliance.

When the correspondent visited the office, two staffers were present.

Party President Rashed Khan Menon was detained on August 22, and its general secretary Fazle Hasan Badshah was abroad for medical treatment, leaving the party activities limited to issuing statements, according to party people.

Acting president Mahmudul Hasan Manik said he was in touch with the party offices. "Our activists are hesitant to return due to fears of harassment," he said.

At the Samyabadi Dal's central office in Topkhana, ailing central leader Sunil Sen was there as he resides in the office. Locals said they did not witness any political programmes recently and hardly any top leaders shows up there anymore.

Since August 5, the party's General Secretary Dilip Barua visited the office only to enquire about Sunil's health. Dilip Barua's phone was unreachable.

On October 25 around 5:30pm, a security guard at the Bangladesh Supreme Party office in Mirpur-1 said the office was empty. The building also houses the Dhaka Zila Committee.

Party office secretary Ibrahim Miah explained over phone that they were in the process of moving to Naya Paltan, which is why no one was present at the Mirpur location.

Only two people including Bangladesh Sangiskritik Mukhtijote's General Secretary Shahjamal Amirul were present at its central office on Mazar Road in Mirpur on October 25 evening. Amirul said that they were not holding public programmes but running their activities online.

"We will launch a public programme soon," he said.

Trump win worries global partners

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The EU and US had planned to push China and rich Gulf states to start paying into UN climate funds.

"Pushing for more ambitious climate finance is going to be almost impossible without the US buy-in, which will de-motivate developing countries from taking seriously the climate ambitions of the West," said Elisabetta Cornago, a senior research fellow at the Centre for European Reform.

Jennifer Morgan, Germany's state secretary for international climate action, said it will be up to Germany and the European Union to maintain leadership in the climate finance discussions to ensure an acceptable result.

Failure to land a strong climate finance deal would be a particularly big setback for the 45-country group of Least Developed Countries in UN climate negotiations, which is demanding countries pay up. One climate minister from Latin America said that while the return of pro-oil drilling Trump and his likely Paris withdrawal are a setback to global climate efforts, the deployment of renewables is attracting trillions of dollars in investments and will continue despite his political manoeuvres.

"The election feels like a slap in the face to climate progress, but it won't stop the global push for clean energy," the official said. "Sticking with fossil fuels is a dead end."

Any weakening in the US' stance on tackling climate change, however, would

make it vital for Europe and China to hold firm. The US, China, and the 27-country European Union are the world's biggest historical polluters.

"If one of the three-legged pillars is wobbling or uncertain, the other two need to hold fast," a European diplomat told Reuters.

Li Shuo, director of China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said the loss of US China political leadership at COP29 and in the future needs to be filled by China and the EU.

"A strengthened climate alliance with Europe and China at the centre is our best hope for the next few years," he said.

US states and cities, meanwhile, are planning to step up and fill the US void at the upcoming climate summit to encourage other countries to keep working toward Paris climate goals.

The US Climate Alliance, America Is All In and Climate Mayors will send delegations to COP29. The groups were formed in 2017 after Trump withdrew the US from the Paris agreement the first time, a move the Biden administration reversed. They represent nearly two-thirds of the US population and three-quarters of US GDP.

A report by the University of Maryland in September found that if Biden administration climate laws and policies are rolled back, non-federal entities like states and cities can achieve a 48 percent emissions reduction by 2035 - falling short of previous US

commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions at least 50 percent compared to 2005 levels by 2030.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden urged Americans to "bring down the temperature" yesterday following Trump's election victory and sought to console fellow Democrats who were alarmed by the former president's stunning comeback.

"Setbacks are unavoidable. Giving up is unforgivable," Biden said at the White House Rose Garden as he addressed staff who were disappointed in Vice President Kamala Harris' defeat. "A defeat does not mean we are defeated."

Biden said Tuesday's election had proven the integrity of the US electoral system and pledged an orderly transfer of power – an implicit rebuke of Trump, who sought to overturn his 2020 defeat to Biden and raised baseless claims of fraud during this year's campaign as well.

Biden invited Trump to come meet at the White House – a courtesy Trump did not offer to Biden in 2020 – and Trump's campaign said the president-elect would go. In the weeks ahead, Trump will select personnel to serve under his leadership.

Trump's victory, surprisingly decisive after opinion polls had shown a neck-and-neck contest, underscored how disenchanted Americans had become with the economy – in particular inflation – along with border security and the direction of the country and its culture.

Inflation hit three-month high

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for people living in poverty – it is crucial that the government increases its social security spending to make this process tolerable," said Ashikur Rahman, principal economist of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

High inflation, particularly food inflation, has affected the purchasing power of low-income people and forced them to cut back on nutritional foods, said Mustafa K Mujeri, executive director of the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development.

"When high inflation persists for a long time, this also reduces coping strategies and gradually narrows opportunities for low-income and low-skilled people," Mujeri said.

For the BB's monetary policy to work to tame the inflationary pressure, it is also important that no ad hoc upward adjustments are brought to energy prices, Rahman said.

"It is essential to understand that monetary

tightening generally takes six to nine months to have a robust effect on inflation. Therefore, we have to remain committed to a tightened monetary framework if we want inflation to come down."

So far, the policy rate has been increased to 10 percent and the BB has refrained from printing money to support the Treasury.

"This should help the overall process," Rahman added.

However, Mujeri said that a contractionary monetary policy is not enough to fight inflation.

There is a need to integrate multiple policies and ensure effective market management.

Before ensuring a proper supply chain, market monitoring or commodity price-setting would not be effective.

"It's a contradictory move," said Mujeri, a former chief economist of the BB.

The government should find out if any vested group is involved with the market

manipulation, he added.

"The impact of the policy rate hikes in lowering inflation rate will take time – given the current situation, our inflation cannot be curtailed by only increasing lending rates," said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The government must put efforts towards market management to ensure adequate supply.

The severe floods across several districts impacted production. Besides, the presence of middlemen, rent seekers and extortionists could not be eliminated yet.

"Market monitoring should also be strengthened to check any attempt to create artificial supply shortages. The Competition Commission must act."

To meet supply shortages, the government should immediately import items. It should also reduce tariffs on imported items and ensure that benefits of reduced tariffs go to the consumers, she added.

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in the provisions that curtailed press freedom, they said.

"The fascist Awami League government transformed the Digital Security Act into the Cyber Security Act last year, but the law had the same objectives," Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam told a press briefing at Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

The interim government will formulate a new law keeping in mind the security of women, children, and financial transactions on the internet, he said.

The CSA was used to sue and harass many people from the minority communities, he said, adding that the law the interim government is going to formulate will ensure the safety of vulnerable groups.

"The law adviser earlier assured that cases filed to curb freedom of expression would be cancelled. These cases should be cancelled," Shafiqul said.

But cases related to pornography, women's safety, and actual cyber security issues would not be dismissed, he added.

Contacted, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said he welcomed the decision to do away with the draconian law.

"We would hope that measures will be duly taken as early as possible to withdraw all cases lodged under the [CSA and DSA] acts," he said, adding that he expected the interim government to compensate the victims of these acts.

A law to combat cybercrimes is needed in every country, he said.

But the new law should

be drafted in a fully participatory process and should be called anything but CSA "because the very name creates a sense of insecurity among the people".

"The law's objective and scope should be limited only to ensuring safety on the internet."

Rights expert Prof CR Abrar, said, "We welcome the decision. This is another achievement of this government. Amending [the CSA] would not have been possible. It should be scrapped not because it was wrongly applied, but because it was applied in a way it was meant to be."

About the law which would replace the CSA, he said it would not be prudent to draft such an important law in a hurry.

As of August, at least 5,818 cases filed under the CSA and its predecessors ICT Act and the DSA were pending in the country's eight cyber tribunals, according to a press release issued by the law ministry on September 30.

Since the fall of the Awami League government in August, demands for repealing or amending controversial laws have been growing.

On November 4, Nahid Islam, adviser to the information ministry, said the CSA would be repealed within a week and pending cases under the act dismissed.

The government is also reviewing other laws that curb freedom of expression.

Many people accused under draconian laws were freed on bail after the interim government took office.

Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul earlier said the CSA would be repealed.

Raft of measures soon

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domestically, inflation will decline, Mansur told reporters after the meeting at the secretariat.

"However, this could take time. The step taken to tighten monetary policy usually takes 12 to 18 months to have an impact on controlling inflation. We have to have patience and will implement the policy with patience," he said.

It was decided at the meeting that each family cardholder would get 10 kilograms of rice instead of 5kg, said Finance Secretary Khairuzzaman Mozumder.

Besides, the number of family card-holders and beneficiaries of open market sales (OMS) will also be increased, he said.

A decision has been taken to withdraw the margin for opening letters of credit to import six to seven essential food items, Mansur said, adding that the notification on this would be issued on Sunday.

Also, the limit for importing essential items will be relaxed for at least two to three months ahead of Ramadan so that the supply remains smooth.

The import price and selling price of the goods in the domestic market will be monitored, he said, adding

that the markets will not be monitored forcefully since it could have adverse effects.

Mansur identified three reasons behind the rise in inflation: the recent floods, workers' wage hikes and the base effect.

Since July, the government has been releasing inflation data without control.

"Now, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics releases data freely. When data is released freely, there could be some changes in percentage, which is known as base-effect," he said.

Due to this effect, inflation may remain high in the next few months, which is known as a statistical artefact, Mansur said.

"The good news is that prices of goods in the international market are declining. Besides, the government has taken several measures. So, inflation will decline for sure."

For example, although the price of rice is high, it is not as high as it was last year, Mansur said.

This time last year, the price of rice was Tk 5 to Tk 6 more for a kilogram.

Besides, the rice price in the local market is lower than in the international market. As a result, importers are not importing rice despite the zero duty on the staple.