

SALUTING THE BRAVEHEARTS
36 days of JULY

PHOTO EXHIBITION
DECEMBER 1-7, 2024
Time: 10:00 AM-8:00 PM
Venue: The Daily Star Centre

STORYTELLING WEEK
Time: 3:00 PM-4:30 PM

PEDAGOGY OF PROTEST
University teachers on the frontlines
MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM
Political representation of women
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

BLACKOUT CHRONICLES
How journalists, activists navigated the Blackout
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

MARGINALISED VOICES OF JULY REVOLUTION
Stories of struggle, sacrifice and hope from workers
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

WRITE TO PROTEST
Writers and poets on their experience
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7



Representatives of volunteer organisations, working for the treatment of those injured in the July uprising, share their experiences at the “Courage amidst crisis” talk, a part of The Daily Star’s storytelling week and photo exhibition titled “36 Days of July: Saluting the Bravehearts”. The photo was taken at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

\$234 billion siphoned off during AL rule

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Debapriya Bhattacharya, the chair of the committee.

Illicit financial outflows constituted a complex web of shadow economy that “thrived on criminal activities of diverse nature and drew sustenance from an unholy alliance of sections of corrupt politicians, businessmen, financial players, middlemen, government officials, influence peddlers and wheeler-dealers of different types”, the white paper said.

These people worked in connivance with and corrupted the country’s executive, legislative, financial, legal and other institutions; undermined domestic investment and revenue mobilisation efforts; depleted forex reserves; weakened the country’s macroeconomic management; and did serious damage to the cause of

good governance in all spheres, it said. “Our blood curdles to know how they plundered the economy. The sad part is they looted the economy openly. And most of us could not summon the courage to confront it,” Yunus said, adding that even the multilateral agencies that monitor Bangladesh’s economy were also largely silent when the plunder took place.

The laundered money was used to buy real estate or funnel the funds through business operations by remaining anonymous, said the 30-chapter and 400-page-long white paper.

A total of 532 people of Bangladeshi origin had real estate worth \$375 million in Dubai and 972 residential properties worth about \$315 million. It has been estimated that \$47-100

billion worth of money was washed or laundered into Canada as a haven to conceal harmful and illegal financial activities.

As of March, Bangladeshi-origin second home owners in Malaysia stood at upwards of 3,600, the report added.

The white paper committee voted for an independent prosecution body to create a proper mandate and to undertake follow-up actions.

Weak prosecution capacity and succumbing to political pressure have constrained the work of follow-up actions by the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, the Criminal Investigation Department and other institutions, it said.

The report suggested processes of asset recovery: conviction, tracing,

case filling in external jurisdiction, freezing, confiscation and asset recovery.

It is not easy to establish the chain of connections involving ill-gotten money, money laundered from the country and the ultimate beneficiary in the destination country, which will be needed to ensure the return of the stolen assets to Bangladesh.

The interim government is taking steps to recover the money.

An asset recovery committee – led by the Bangladesh Bank governor – has been set up to recover the stolen money.

It has also decided to discard the provision that allowed the whitening of black money and enforce the provision of submission of wealth statements by government officials.

“All these steps are in the right

direction,” the white paper said.

Money laundering from Bangladesh through illicit financial channels had thrived and flourished in an environment of political indulgence and patronage, institutionalised corruption, legal impunity and overall lack of good governance in economic management.

“Getting rid of this curse will call for an uncompromising political will to address the problem head-on.”

This will entail the restoration of accountability and good governance in economic management, enforcement of legal provisions, zero tolerance against corruption and corrupt practices, institutional strengthening and interagency coordination, it added.

Tarique, Babar, all others acquitted

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The bench said the confessional statements given by the accused were not true as they were coerced into giving the statements in the Taskforce Interrogation Cell, which has no legal basis.

There is no documentary, ocular or circumstantial evidence to prove the charges, the HC said.

It added that there was no eyewitness in the cases and the trial court had delivered the verdicts on hearsay statements.

Details of the HC judgment will be known when its full text will be released.

Contacted, Deputy Attorney General Md Jashim Sarker said the state may challenge the HC judgment at the Supreme Court’s Appellate Division after the full text is published.

“I have already given a note to the attorney general for filing an appeal,” he said.

Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman told journalists that an appeal should be moved against the HC verdict, but his office will take a decision on the matter after examining the full text.

The two cases – one for murder and another under the Explosives Substances Act – were filed after the gruesome grenade attack on an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka claimed 24 lives and left about 300 injured.

Then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, who later ran the country for 15 years as prime minister and was forced to resign and flee on August 5 this year following a mass uprising, narrowly escaped the attack.

A judicial inquiry commission formed by the then BNP-led alliance government had found “foreign enemy link” with the attack. The

supplementary charge sheet was prepared after the Awami League returned to power.

The Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka delivered the verdicts in the two cases on October 10, 2018, sentencing 19 people, including Babar to death. Tarique, now in London, and 18 others were sentenced to life in jail while 11 others got prison sentences of different terms.

Those sentenced to death also included Abdus Salam Pintu, a former BNP deputy minister, Brig Gen (ret’d) Rezaqul Haider, former director of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and late Brig Gen (ret’d) Abdur Rahim, former director general of the National Security Intelligence.

The other 18 persons, who were sentenced to life imprisonment, include late Abul Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to BNP Chairperson and the then prime minister Khaleda Zia; and Kazi Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad, a former BNP lawmaker, were among those who were sentenced to life imprisonment.

DEFENCE LAWYERS’ REACTION

SM Shahjahan, the principal defence counsel for the accused, told reporters that they have got justice because the charges were not proven in terms of evidence as well as law.

He said the HC clearly stated that the conviction of an accused cannot be based solely on the confessional statements of other accused; and criminal conspiracy charges cannot be established solely on a confessional statement.

Besides Hannan’s statement, which he later retracted, the HC found no evidence against the accused mentioned in the first charge sheet, Shahjahan said. The names of Tarique, Babar and 28 others were included in

the supplementary charge sheet.

The lawyer said a supplementary charge sheet can only be submitted by the investigation officer if he or she finds new evidence. But, in these two cases, the second charge sheet was submitted following a petition filed by the public prosecutor.

Shahjahan added that none of the 225 witnesses, apart from the investigation officer and the magistrate, said he or she had seen who threw the grenades. Nobody in their confessional statements said they had thrown the grenades or seen who threw them.

Shishir Manir, who stood for three of the accused, alleged the confessional statements were extracted through torture as the investigation focused on implicating political opponents instead of identifying the real culprits. “We all want justice for the August 21 incident, but justice cannot be achieved by arbitrarily accusing individuals. This case serves as a lesson that politically motivated charges cannot bring a good outcome.”

Zainul Abedin, president of pro-BNP lawyers’ association Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, alleged the Awami League government had used the cases as a political tool.

“They aimed to keep Tarique Rahman out of the country. They even sought the death penalty for him, but the court found no evidence to justify such a sentence,” he said.

Kayser Kamal, secretary general of the association, said that the August 21 cases were the “most propagandised legal cases” in Bangladesh’s political history over the past two decades.

“The cases were filed to politically undermine Tarique Rahman both nationally and internationally,” Kamal said.

Govt must act as guardian of the injured

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work together while other stakeholders with grassroots experience should be involved in the efforts.

Emu also stated the lack of monitoring of field-level executions of the government measures.

“The framework to oversee whether strategies are being implemented effectively at the grassroots is missing. For example, while a coordination cell was announced in Dhaka hospitals, there seems to be no monitoring mechanism for its activities or accountability for its actions.”

She added that the main challenge in ensuring treatment and rehabilitation of the injured and families of dead protesters is inequality. “There is clear difference between the treatment of the rich and that of the poor.”

“The government has stated that 20,000 people are injured. Which means 20,000 families – or about 80,000 to 100,000 people – are in critical situations. The government must take the lead, and we are willing to provide full support.”

This is not just about financial aid. The government needs to act as a guardian for the injured and develop a strategy accordingly, she said.

Lyana Mahfuz, a volunteer of the Chattogram unit of Empowering Our Fighters platform, said injured patients from outside the capital face difficulties when coming to Dhaka, as they cannot find the government representatives designated to assist them.

“Many arrive without a place to stay in Dhaka. Although treatment is said to be free, other costs, such as for accommodation for the patients’ attendants and the transport to Dhaka, remain burdensome.”

Shakibur Rahman Rony, member and a key founder of Empowering Our Fighters, said, “While the government promises free treatment, many cannot

afford to travel to Dhaka for care. Even accessing free treatment is complex. A single test requires signatures from five-six people, and often, those responsible are unavailable.”

He stated that the injured from low-income groups are the worst victims.

“They lack financial resources and social influence. Moreover, there is a communication gap between them and the doctors. The government should have arranged for volunteers to assist patients at all times.”

Shoilee Akhund, a member of Centre for Critical Discourse, said comprehensive information about all the injured is still missing.

“There are injured victims who are intellectually challenged, as well as unidentified deceased persons who were mentally unwell. While the lists of martyrs include students and workers, no one talks about these groups.”

She said the government announced free medication, but there is no clarity on which medicines are free.

“Patients often have to visit hospitals multiple times for medicine.... While we’ve tried to personally provide support, this is actually the responsibility of the health department, not individuals.”

Addressing the event, Monisha Mafuza, organiser of Chobbbisher Uttara, said the government has systems and teams for ensuring treatments and rehabilitation, including frontline health workers and department officials.

“Effective communication with them could have expedited the process. Yet, even now, a complete list [of injured victims] has not been prepared.”

She said many volunteers like her are trying to resume normal work but cannot do so as they are having to spend all their time tending to injured victims.

“We have to continue working. While

we want to help, this is fundamentally the state’s responsibility. Though, the new government faces many challenges, they must engage skilled individuals and break old systems to create effective networks with stakeholders.”

Kaniz Fatima Mithila, an organiser of Loraku Chobbbish, said, “We were mentally prepared to deal with critically injured people. However, our trauma began 40-45 days later when we saw people deteriorating due to mismanagement. Proper treatment from the start could have prevented many amputations.”

She said there is still no complete list of the injured or deceased, which is a huge challenge for volunteers working for the injured.

“The process of creating these lists is also concerning. These tasks require government coordination.”

“We initially thought our involvement would last 15-20 days, after which the government would take over, but this has not happened. Until the government acts decisively, we have no alternatives [but to continue ourselves].”

She also said there was a duplication of efforts, where multiple volunteer teams were working in the same hospital, depriving patients of other hospitals their support.

“The government should coordinate area-wise teams to avoid this. Each patient has unique requirements and the government must identify individual needs and respond accordingly.”

“Why are we not utilising the experience from the Covid-19 period, such as making an app like the ‘Shurokkha app’ and provide regular health briefings? Why are we pushing these individuals towards worsening conditions every day?” she questioned.



CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, and others unveil two books on CPD at an event celebrating the organisation’s 30th anniversary.

PHOTO: STAR

Structural reforms needed

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“I told them that you will not find any institution in the world whose thoughts are being discussed on the floor of the parliament. So, you can think that your thoughts have achieved national attention.”

Hasina was looking for 80 percent marks but the CPD gave her 33 percent marks only. “So, her main complaint was why the CPD has not recognised her singular achievement in development.”

In its 30-year journey, the CPD created a space for civil society to be heard.

The noted economist also called for making a citizen’s commission for rural development. “Even 30 years ago, I called for reform in the agricultural sector,” Sobhan added.

The CPD tried to use research to bring change in the society, said its distinguished fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya.

Free speech, free media and patriotism were criminalised in Bangladesh in the past 30 years, said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

“That has happened as our political and bureaucratic leadership lacked the capacity to understand that a critic can

be a well-wisher. As a result, critics were treated as enemies all the time.”

He also touched upon the much-talked-about ‘minus two formula’.

“The so-called minus two formula was provoked by the armed forces and everybody knows it. But, the CPD, TIB, the Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were bracketed together for this,” he added.

Bangladesh is now at a crossroads, so how it will go further is a big question among the people, said Matuier Rahman, editor of Prothom Alo.

“There are many ifs and buts on whether the government will turn into a weak government, whether the government will continue its reform activities.”

Here, the CPD along with other civil society can play a big role in bringing about cultural, ideological and political change so that the country can go to the next level of development.

“But, this change should be acceptable to the people of the country,” Rahman added.

The private sector is going through a tough time, said Rubana Huq, vice-chancellor of the Asian University for Women.

She requested not to judge the whole private sector by the misdeeds of some

Ukraine needs arms, Nato invite before Russia talks

Says Zelensky after meeting EU representatives in Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that his country needed security guarantees from Nato and more weapons to defend itself before any talks with Russia.

He made the comments after meeting the EU’s new head of diplomacy Kaja Kallas and EU Council chief Antonio Costa, who were visiting Kyiv as a show of support on their first day in office.

“An invitation for Ukraine to join Nato is a necessary thing for our survival,” Zelensky said at a press conference with Costa.

Ukraine faces a tough winter ahead, with Russia unleashing devastating barrages against its power grid and Kyiv’s fatigued forces losing ground on the frontline.

Questions are also swirling around the future of US support once Donald Trump assumes the presidency in January, with fears he could force Kyiv to make painful concessions in pursuit of a quick peace deal.