



**CENTRE:** Locals yesterday morning continued tearing down the Sheikh Bari, which was already half demolished the night before, with hammers and other handheld tools. The photo was taken in Khulna city. **LEFT TOP:** Sudha Sadan, the residence of Sheikh Hasina's late husband MA Wazed Miah, was set ablaze around 11:00pm on Wednesday. **LEFT BOTTOM:** Books and other items being burned at the top floor of the extended building of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi 32. **RIGHT TOP:** A woman shielded by some youths from a mob assaulting her for allegedly expressing support for the Awami League in Dhanmondi 32 yesterday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

## Dhanmondi 32 remnants being torn down

FROM PAGE 1

Shortly before midnight, at least one crane and an excavator arrived at the scene. By 2:00am yesterday, parts of the building were razed to the ground.

The excavators left the scene by around 11:00am yesterday, leaving the house to be demolished manually.

More than half of the building was torn down by that time, while a number of people were tearing apart the rest of the structure with hammers and digging bars.

The protesters also started razing down the building behind Bangabandhu's residence. This building housed an art gallery and was an extension of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

Another building in the adjacent plot with the offices of several Awami League outfits was also being demolished. By noon, most of the inner walls had been torn down, with the main structure still standing.

Thousands of people from all walks of life thronged the site. Most of them were visitors who took photos, selfies and videos, with the demolished house and hoisted flags in the background. Some were chanting slogans intermittently.

Some other groups of low-income people primarily focused on tearing out the pipes and other metal fittings of the buildings.

They were taking away anything with a resale value, including books. Piles of the materials on the road were being loaded onto rickshaws or vans. The rest of the rubble remained untouched.

A young man, wearing a flag bandana, walked out of the art gallery building with a book on Sheikh Russell, Mujib's youngest son killed with most members of the family on August 15, 1975.

"I found it inside. There were a few but people took them all. You won't find any now," he said.

Sirajul, a resident of Hazaribagh, was seen loading various items onto

his van. "I'll sell them to scrap dealers. What else can I do? Everyone is taking things, so I took whatever I could find," he said.

Sujan, who was cutting rods from the partially demolished building, said, "They are demolishing it, so we are taking whatever we can. Whatever we get is a gain."

By around 12:30pm, a group gathered outside the house with a microphone and chanted slogans in favour of the 2024 student-led mass uprising and against the fallen Awami League regime.

The slogans included: "Delhi Na Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka! (Delhi or Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka!)"; "Bottrish Na Chhotrish? Chhotrish, Chhotrish! (Thirty-two or thirty-six? Thirty-six, thirty-six!)"; "Ekta Ekta League Dhor, Dhoira Dhoira Jobai Kor (Catch League members, one by one, and execute them)"; "Dalali Na Mukti? Mukti, Mukti! (Brokerage or freedom? Freedom, freedom!)"; "Khuni Hasina Fashi Chai (We demand execution of murderer Hasina)"; "Amar Bhai Kobore, Khuni Keno Baire? (My brother is in the grave, why is the murderer free?)"; and "Sobkhane Khobor De, Mujibbader Kober De (Spread the word to everyone, bury Mujibism!)."

Jihadul Islam, one of the participants, said, "Where is the arrogance of power now? Where is the pain of losing loved ones? People couldn't even walk past this house during the day. Today, those same people are demolishing the house, taking away bricks as they please. I hope future leadership will learn from the downfall of this autocracy."

Meanwhile, some people beat a man and a woman in front of the Dhanmondi 32 residence between 11:00am and 11:30am. The identity of the victims could not be confirmed. Eyewitnesses said they were beaten for chanting "Joy Bangla" and speaking in favour of the AL.

After the injured man fell to the

ground following the assault around 11:00am, several people took him away from the scene and place him on a rickshaw.

Shortly afterwards, the woman began speaking in favour of the AL, witnesses said. She reportedly referred to the house as "Apar Bari (sister's house)", which led to an argument between her and the angry crowd.

Subsequently, the crowd beat and humiliated her.

A journalist who witnessed the incident told The Daily Star that the woman was taken towards the main road. She pleaded with the crowd not to hit her. Later, a few other women helped her onto a rickshaw.

Earlier, the overnight demonstration at the site had resumed after a brief pause, with hundreds gathering at the location.

### SUDHA SADAN

The "Bulldozer March" programme was not limited to Dhanmondi 32. After launching the demolition there, protesters set fire to Sudha Sadan, Hasina's residence at Dhanmondi 5, around 10:45pm on Wednesday.

The fire set on Wednesday night was still burning in some parts of the building yesterday morning. By noon, despite the intense heat inside, people were removing rods, sofas, chairs, tables, partially burnt furniture, air conditioners, refrigerators, and other items.

Saleha Akhtar was loading various items onto a rickshaw from the front of the house. "Everything is burnt. Many people came early in the morning and took whatever they could. I also took whatever I found. If I can sell it, I might get some money," she said.

For some time in the past, the Awami League had offices in this house. It remained locked afterwards, with Hasina visiting the house on some occasions. Throughout her tenure, a large number of security personnel were deployed to protect the house.

offices of AL, Jatiya Party, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal in the town last night.

Demonstrators also set fire to several properties, including the Feni district AL office and the houses of ex-MPs Lt Gen (retd) Masud Uddin Chowdhury, and Alauddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

In Thakurgaon, protesters defaced five murals of Sheikh Mujib, Sheikh Russell, and Sheikh Moni in the town.

Bangabandhu's murals were vandalised at four places in Kurigram yesterday.

In Manikganj, protesters defaced Bangabandhu Square in front of the deputy commissioner's office yesterday evening.

The front part of the house of former food minister and Naogaon AL General Secretary Sadhan Chandra Majumder was demolished and the house was torched around 5:30pm.

In Habiganj, Bangabandhu's mural, located in front of the deputy commissioner's office, was vandalised last night.

In Patuakhali, a mural of Sheikh Mujib near a Rab camp was defaced by protesters yesterday morning, said witnesses.

Another mural of Mujib at the Brahmanbaria Government College was vandalised yesterday afternoon.

Two murals of Mujib were demolished with an excavator in Boda of Panchagarh.

In Khulna's Digholia upazila, demonstrators vandalised the guest house and other structures on reportedly Sheikh Hasina's familial land.

On Wednesday night, protesters demolished houses of AL leaders and defaced murals of Sheikh Mujib in at least 10 districts, according to our correspondents.

The districts are Khulna, Kushtia, Chattogram, Sylhet, Rangpur, Barishal, Mymensingh, Chuadanga, Narayanganj, and Pabna.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report.]

## Prof Yunus to visit

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The Commission sought to take some of the victims to some of these secret prisons, including the Taskforce for Interrogation Complex located inside the Rab headquarters and the Crime Prevention Company 3 unit of Rab 2, said the letter signed by Commission Secretary Ashikul Khabir.

"Accordingly, we had communicated with the victims and prepared them given the sensitivity of the matter," said the letter, adding that it was agreed in principle that their presence is crucial.

During the previous visits, the Commission was not allowed to take photos of these secret prison cells, and so it is extremely important for the victims to be present during the inspection for identification purposes, it said.

Without identification, it would not be possible to ensure justice for the victims, it added.

Under the circumstances, the Commission "expresses its inability to visit the detention centres (the so-called Aynagar)" since the visit would not be fruitful without some of the victims being present there, it said.

"The Commission will ensure its participation only if the victims are allowed in," the letter concluded.

The advisory council's decision about Prof Yunus's forthcoming visit came a week after the letter. However, it is not clear if the victims of enforced disappearance would be allowed in.

Comments from the Commission members were not immediately available.

## Will firmly resist arson, vandalism

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32 on Wednesday was "unexpected and undesirable".

The incident was a manifestation of anger triggered by Sheikh Hasina's provocative remarks against the July uprising, said the Chief Adviser's Press Wing in a statement yesterday.

It said over the last six months there had been no attack there. "This incident happened on Wednesday night over the statement of fugitive Sheikh Hasina, which has two aspects."

"By making irrelevant, absurd, and hateful remarks about the martyrs of the mass uprising, fugitive Sheikh Hasina has shown disregard and disrespect to the July uprising."

Secondly, despite having to flee amid the uprising, Hasina continues to speak in the same threatening tone as she did while holding on to power through corruption, terrorism, and repression, the statement said.

"She is relentlessly attacking the wounds of the uprising in people's minds and threatening every person who participated in it," it said, adding that the reaction to her violent behaviour caused the incident of vandalism.

"Sheikh Hasina has threatened to create instability in the country," said the statement.

The government remains highly vigilant in protecting the lives and properties of the people. Law enforcement agencies are making every possible effort to bring the situation under control.

If Hasina, accused of crimes against humanity, refrains from making statements, such incidents can be avoided in the future, it said.

"The government expects that India will not allow its territory to be used for activities that create instability in Bangladesh and will not give Sheikh Hasina the scope to speak," it added.

"The government will examine what legal actions can be taken against those involved in inciting unrest," the statement said.

## 14 individuals

FROM PAGE 1

Mahmudur Rahman will receive the award for their contributions to the field of journalism. The latter has also been mentioned for his contribution to the field of human rights.

Shahidul Alam was named for contributions in the fields of culture and education while Dr Niaz Zaman for education.

Mehedi Hasan Khan will receive the award for science and technology, while Mohammad Yusuf Chowdhury (posthumous) will be honoured for social service.

Meanwhile, Moidul Hasan will receive the Ekushey Padak for research.

## BTRC's bid to regain

FROM PAGE 1

On top of that, the pre-approval requirement causes unnecessary delays, creating a major hurdle for investors, Bari added.

Subsequently on October 22 last year, a meeting on the draft of the "Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act, 2024" was held under the chairmanship of the secretary of the Posts and Telecommunications Division.

In the meeting, it was decided that the BTRC would prepare and submit the draft to the Posts and Telecommunications Division.

Following this, the BTRC formed a committee to draft a law aimed at expanding the scope of the telecommunications sector, modernising existing telecom regulations and aligning them with internationally recognised standards.

The BTRC has already sent the draft amendments to the ministry on January 14.

In the draft, the BTRC also brought social media platforms, over-the-top (OTT) content providers, online streaming companies, and broadcasting companies under the act.

The BTRC also proposed repealing the section that mandates taking all necessary actions to establish its rights and fulfil its obligations under

international laws, regulations, or any international agreements related to telecommunications.

It sought to revert to the original mandate of the law that had bestowed this power upon the commission.

The 2010 amendments to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Act significantly weakened the BTRC's independence, transforming it into an extension of the ministry, said Abu Nazam M Tanveer Hossain, a telecom expert.

"This has not only deterred telecom investments but also led to regulatory actions heavily influenced by government revenue targets, rather than prioritising consumer interests. To ensure the public receives the best possible telecom services at optimal prices, it's imperative to reinstate the BTRC's independent status," he added.

The industry people welcomed the changes in the draft as they think the BTRC's independence will enable quicker services, enhancing efficiency in the sector.

"However, for matters such as licence grants, fines, cancellations and the appointment of administrators, we think there should be an arbitration clause to help operators resolve disputes between the regulator and the operators, ensuring checks and balances," said an official of an operator wishing anonymity.

## Stop Hasina from making false remarks

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He said in reference to the vandalism at Dhanmondi 32 and houses and other establishments of Awami League leaders across the country.

Hasina delivered her speech through social media on Wednesday night. Around the same time, hundreds of protesters destroyed the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi and other installations linked to Awami League in different parts of the country.

Dhaka requested New Delhi to immediately take appropriate measures, in the spirit of mutual respect and understanding, to stop her from making such false, fabricated, and incendiary statements using social media and other communications while she is in India.

Earlier, Dhaka had written New Delhi to restrain Hasina, who fled to India after her ouster on August 5 amid a mass uprising, from making speeches.

In December last year, the ministry also had sent a diplomatic note to the Indian government, seeking her extradition as she faces numerous cases for killings during the mass uprising in July-August last year.

Asked what was India's response, the adviser said the Indian government stated that they were not providing any platform to Hasina, but she was using her own phone and making statements. The platforms she is using are based in other countries, including in the US.

Responding to a query as to why the government did not properly act to prevent the destruction on Wednesday night, Touhid said it took a few days to stabilise the law and order after the August 5 changeover, but the remarks of Hasina were so aggressive that the students could not take it.

"But you know the army personnel rushed there and contained the incident. It could have been worse otherwise," he said.

Dhaka's relations with New Delhi strained since Hasina was sheltered in India.

Touhid said Dhaka tried to remove the uneasiness and establish a balanced relationship with New Delhi that is mutually beneficial, and that effort is continuing.

He said Pakistan took an initiative to normalise relations with Bangladesh and "we accepted that initiative".

"This act of vandalism should be strongly condemned."

## BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Touhid said Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar may visit Dhaka in April as part of improving bilateral relations, but did not detail the meeting agenda.

He said there are some unsettled issues for 54 years with Pakistan that Bangladesh will definitely mention. However, Bangladesh wants to see normal relations with Pakistan like those with another country.

"I don't see any reason to strain relations with the country by singling it out," he said, adding, "If the relations stand on the same position, it is neither good for us nor for them. We will definitely try to ensure our interest."

He said Pakistan took an initiative to normalise relations with Bangladesh and "we accepted that initiative".