

Aynagar horrors never again

FROM PAGE 1
said. "People have been deprived of their bare minimum human rights."

He added that he heard there were over 1,700 victims. "But there are victims who are still unknown. Some say the total number could be 3,000," he said.

"People have disappeared, they have vanished. No one knows where they are. A daughter was with us today. She said it had been nine years since her mother had been taken away. She was there when her mother was picked up. It's heartbreaking."

"The hardest truth here is: the perpetrators are our children, our brothers and our family members. If we cannot bring our society out of this, if our children do things that humans cannot do, then our society will not survive."

He added that one of the victims described the cell as smaller than a chicken coop. "It is our crime that we let this happen."

The individuals responsible for these must be held accountable.

Yunus then said the evidence would

be kept sealed and secured so that it can be used in legal proceedings and future trials.

"We want to build a new Bangladesh, a new environment... We must ensure that this never happens again in the future. This is one of the worst crimes ever committed in the world."

Advisers Nahid Islam and Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain identified the cells in which they were kept after being picked up by men in plainclothes during the mass uprising.

Nahid was kept at a joint interrogation cell operated by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) inside a detention centre of Rab-2 while Asif was kept at the Taskforce Intelligence Centre in the Rab headquarters.

Nahid said one side of the room had something resembling a sink. It was used as a toilet.

After August 5, the day Sheikh Hasina fled the country, some of the walls had been demolished and some repainted, he added.

Asif recognised the cell from its walls and mentioned that there was an exhaust fan at the top of the wall.

He told journalists that he was kept incommunicado in the cell for four days. Even when he had to go to the toilet, his captors would blindfold him and then take him out of the cell.

The visitors included former Brig Gen Abdullah Aman Azmi, son of late Jamaat leader Ghulam Azam. He was kept in a secret prison for eight years.

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, the younger son of executed Jamaat leader Mir Quasem Ali, and Humman Quader Chowdhury, son of executed BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, were also among the visitors. Ahmad had been in a secret cell for eight years and Humman for seven months.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam later said locations of the secret cells would be identified.

Asked why only a select few journalists could accompany Prof Yunus, Shafiqul said the rooms were extremely narrow and in some cases, pathways were created by "breaking bricks". The entire process was logically challenging.

He expressed regret for not being able to invite more journalists.

courts.

"We have to make sure that universal jurisdiction can work for people who are outside the country," said Turk, adding that the perpetrators of serious human rights violations cannot be let scot free and must be brought to account.

He called these investigations complex. "When cases are difficult to prosecute it is better to refer to the international jurisdictions," he said.

Mungoven pointed out that criminal investigations will face many challenges, and one is that the system has not changed. "Many people who were appointed by the last regime continue to operate in the government. This continues to obstruct reform."

"When you have a police force that is not yet reformed, tasked with investigating the crimes of the police, there is a conflict of interest."

Volker Turk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, underscored the need for investigations, trial and justice and the possibility of trying these crimes in international

'This is where I was held captive'

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier in 2022, Iqbal had given an interview anonymously to The Daily Star. "My room had an iron bed, and I was given four blankets to make a mattress. A light bulb shone at all times, and an exhaust fan whirred at the corner of the door," he had said.

The other room is a small cell with rugged white walls that Iqbal yesterday recognised as the room where he was interrogated. "I was kept inside that room for three weeks at a stretch."

Former Bangladesh ambassador to Vietnam M Maroof Zaman, an enforced disappearance victim who was kept in an Aynagar for over 15 months, told The Daily Star that after seeing the photos, he could identify the three rooms and toilet where he was detained in DGFI custody.

"In one of the rooms, a CCTV camera was still visible, but they had removed four fans [that were previously there]. They broke the wall beside the toilet and repainted the rooms.

"There were hundreds of names written on the wall, but they were erased. They tried to destroy all the evidence."

Expressing frustrations, Zaman further said, "The student leaders who were kept there for a few days visited the site. We were held there for years, yet we weren't invited."

Mikel Chakma, who had been held captive since April 2019 and released after the fall of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, also recognised his cell.

He posted the photos of two cells and wrote his reaction on Facebook,

saying he was kept inside one of the cells with the rugged white walls and iron gates for nearly two years and later moved to an adjacent cell.

"These rooms were monitored 24 hours with a CCTV camera, as seen on the left side of the photo," he captioned one of the photographs he posted.

The other cell he identified was the same high walled one recognised by Iqbal. Mikel said he was kept there for a year.

"After this cell, there is one more, and then there is a toilet and a cell in which we would get haircuts."

Another survivor, who preferred anonymity, saw the photos and recognised the cells of the Taskforce Intelligence Centre inside the Rab headquarters in Uttara. "The cell I was kept in had a metal slab with spikes on it on the floor. Those spikes have now been removed."

He added that shackles were attached to the walls to hang and torture victims.

However, the broader community of victims, survivors and their families were not included in the visit.

Sanjida Islam Tulee, coordinator of Mayer Daak, a platform representing families of enforced disappearance victims, staged a protest in front of its Shaheenbagh office, saying that victims continue to be deprived of justice.

"It was our demand that all Aynaghs be opened to the victims and their families. But we're still being stonewalled. Those who have perpetrated the crimes, are still being protected."

Ukraine detains top intel official allegedly aiding Russia

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday that it had detained a high ranking official within its own security services who was allegedly working for Russia.

Kyiv claims to have detained hundreds of people -- including officials and security officers -- for allegedly aiding or collaborating with Russia since it invaded in 2022.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said that agency head Vasyl Maluk had personally carried out the arrest and that President Volodymyr Zelensky was informed of the operation, codenamed "rat".

"The chief of staff of the SBU Anti-Terrorist Centre was working for the enemy," the SBU said in a statement posted on social media.

The SBU said it had documented 14 cases of illegal activity by the suspect and opened a trial on high treason charges that carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The "extremely complex" and "multi-stage" operation revealed how the suspect collected and transmitted information to Russia, the SBU said.

EC seeks record Tk 2,794cr for next nat'l polls

FROM PAGE 12

1.82 lakh police and Rab officers, 2,355 Coast Guard and 47,000 BGB personnel -- were deployed in the last election.

Besides, another several lakh people served as presiding and other polling officials.

If the budget remains unchanged, this would be the most expensive election in the country.

EC's budget may increase significantly due to the rise of different election materials and each year, the law enforcement agencies press for increasing their allowances, EC officials said.

The EC has sought another Tk 3,127 crore for various other local government elections as well as other expenses.

Lalon festival called off

FROM PAGE 12

Mahmudullah, and Qawmi Ulama Parishad President Solaiman Kasemi, along with 10 to 15 others attended the meeting. Lalon Sangha was represented by its president, Associate Professor Farhad Hossain Tarafdar, and Sabuj Mia.

"Islamic party leaders at the meeting said that Lalon's ideology is impermissible, 'kufr or shirk'. They refused to allow it to spread in Madhupur," Sabuj wrote. "We clarified that our event was for entertainment, not for spreading any ideology and that the controversial songs would not be performed. But they insisted that only a 'normal concert' without Lalon would be acceptable."

Later that night, Multi Anwar Hossain informed a senior BNP leader that no function would be allowed.

"To prevent any deterioration of law and order, we decided to cancel the event," Sabuj added.

Asked, Hefazat's Mahmudullah told The Daily Star they opposed "promoting Lalon's ideology, which conflicts with Islam."

Madhupur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Zubair Hossain confirmed he was invited but said organisers informed him of the cancellation on Tuesday night without further details.

Proof won't be shared

FROM PAGE 1
so it can be used," Rory Mungoven, chief of the Asia-Pacific region at the UN rights office, said at a press conference in Geneva yesterday.

On cooperating with Bangladesh's judicial processes, he added, "The issue of the death penalty is a problem for us -- as a UN policy, we are constrained from cooperating with trials that may lead to the death penalty."

He stressed that the process must be credible, fair, and adhere to international standards.

"We hope this will lead to a reconsideration of the death penalty in Bangladesh because it perpetuates a cycle of revenge," Mungoven said.

He also said that the death penalty would pose a barrier to the extradition of perpetrators hiding in other countries.

Ex-Ctg police commissioner

FROM PAGE 12
CMP Commissioner Hasib Aziz told The Daily Star, "He [Saiful] was arrested in Dhaka based on a specific allegation in connection with a murder case."

Following the hearing, Saiful, wearing a black mask and white helmet, was taken aboard a black microbus under tight security.

As a Bangladesh Civil Services officer from the 20th batch, Saiful previously served as the deputy inspector general of Metro Rail (MIRT) Police in Dhaka.

He is accused of involvement in the murder of Hridoy Chandra Tarua, a

ACC finds proof

FROM PAGE 12
headquarters on Kemal Attaturk Avenue in the capital's Banani, Didar headed out to Gulshan.

A group of miscreants followed him from the Nagad's headquarters, intercepted his car when it got to Banani road number 12 and launched an attack with hammers. The miscreants also physically assaulted Didar, he told The Daily Star.

The attack severely injured the

third-year history student at CU. Hridoy was shot in the back during a protest at Chattogram's Bahaddarhat on July 18 and died from his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital five days later.

Meanwhile, a DB team from Dhaka detained SP Tanvir Salehin Emon from Sardah Police Academy around 10:30am. However, the reason for his detention remains undisclosed.

Emon joined the police force in 2010 as part of the 28th BCS cadre. Before his post at Sardah, he served as deputy commissioner at DMP.

His father Md Iqbal was a freedom fighter and former general secretary

of the Karimganj upazila Awami League in Kishoreganj.

Rajon Kumar Saha, former assistant commissioner of DMP (Badda zone), was also arrested yesterday for his alleged involvement

in crimes against humanity in the capital's Rampura during the July uprising.

Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim, a prosecutor at the International Crimes Tribunal, confirmed the arrest but did not disclose further details.

On February 8, five police officers, including DIG Molla Nazrul Islam, were arrested in various locations in the country.

20 disposed of the GD as Didar did not appear before the court as asked, so permission was not given to investigate the GD.

Bangladesh Bank Spokesman Arif Hossain Khan confirmed yesterday's attack and said Didar, also a central bank director, has been advised to file a case.

Khan assured that the matter would be handled through legal procedures.

The other six judges of the bench were Justice M Enayetur Rahim, Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam, Justice Md Abu Zafor Siddique, Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, Justice Md Shahinur Islam and Justice Kashefa Hussain.

The Appellate Division in its opinion said that the president can form the interim government during the current situation as there was no parliament and the prime minister resigned from office, the SC registrar general said.

The full Appellate Division bench headed by then chief justice Obaidul Hassan gave the opinion after the president sought it through the law ministry.

On August 8 last year, President Mohammed Shahabuddin

are made, the tribunal will take legal action," he said.

Following a prosecution appeal, the tribunal also extended by two months the deadline for submitting the investigation report in a case filed against 11 people, including Maj Gen (relied) Ziaul Ahsan, over enforced disappearances. The tribunal set April 20 as the new submission date. The prosecution was scheduled to submit its report yesterday.

"Since the case involves allegations of enforced disappearances across the country from 2009 to 2024, we appealed for more time to complete the investigation. The tribunal granted our request," the prosecution said.

Of the accused, only Ziaul Ahsan was produced before the tribunal during the hearing.

The court also issued arrest warrants for two accused in connection with crimes against humanity in the Rampura area during the July uprising.

ICT Prosecutor Tamim confirmed the arrest but did not disclose the time and location of the arrest.

Later in the day, Rajan was produced before the tribunal that sent him to jail.

The OHCHR said it could not provide its own estimate regarding the scale of revenge violence, particularly the killings of police officers and Awami League members.

However, the Awami League provided the OHCHR with a detailed list containing names, dates, and causes of killings. According to this list, 144 officials and members of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations were killed in attacks between July 1 and August 15. And 18 of them were killed between August 6 and 15.

The OHCHR received reports of violent mobs forcing Hindu headmasters and teachers to resign. In one instance, local BNP leaders were among the perpetrators, according to the victim's testimony.

According to National Security Intelligence information provided to the OHCHR via the interim government, 37 violent attacks

targeting minorities took place between August 5 and 15. Most incidents involved vandalism, looting, or arson.

The OHCHR, however, was not in a position to independently verify these incidents, the report said.

It also documented revenge attacks against media outlets perceived as being biased toward the Awami League.

The report said many journalists have been accused of murder and other violent crimes. Several prominent journalists viewed as supportive of the Awami League or critical of its political opposition, said the report.

There are also concerns about undue pressure on defence lawyers, some of whom were refused access to court, assaulted and threatened, and permitted only limited access to their clients or case files, according to witnesses.

The report said the government informed the OHCHR that many lawyers who would have normally represented defendants linked to the former government and Awami League had fled or no longer came to court, but that Bangladesh had a legal aid mechanism to ensure representation of any accused who would otherwise not be represented.



Police inspect the body of a man at the site of a Russian missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.



Police inspect the body of a man at the site of a Russian missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.