

DHAKA

Batons and water cannons used to disperse protesters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police charged batons and used water cannons yesterday to disperse protesters demanding the reinstatement of 6,531 assistant teacher appointments in government primary schools.

Many protesters were injured, but they remained on the road despite the police intervention.

The protesters were continuing their sit-in at Shahbagh for the eighth consecutive day yesterday.

Over 300 candidates began gathering in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh at 9:00am, said Khaled Mansur, officer in charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

The law enforcers took action around 2:00pm.

Holding placards in their hands, the protesters were seen chanting slogans in support of their demands. Some had travelled from different parts of the country, and a few even brought their children along. A photojournalist reported that some protesters were also wearing shrouds.

In another development, sacked police officials, who were dismissed at different times during the Awami League government, staged a demonstration yesterday demanding reinstatement.

They marched towards the Secretariat from Jatiya Press Club around 12:00pm to meet the home affairs adviser with their demands.

As they took position in front of the Secretariat, law enforcers intervened and charged batons to disperse them.

The protesters claimed several of them were injured.

One of the protesters, Ayub Ali, was treated at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Masud Alam, sub-inspector of DMCH Police Outpost.

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Left, a woman falls on the ground as police shoot water from a cannon while another tries to protect her during a sit-in at Shahbagh yesterday. Police used batons and water cannons to disperse the protesters, top right, demanding reinstatement of their appointment as assistant teachers in government primary schools. Bottom right, police charged batons to disperse sacked police officials, who were dismissed during the Awami League government, in front of the Secretariat.

PHOTO: STAR

Constitution reform possible before polls

Says Prof Ali Riaz

STAR REPORT



Several issues of the constitution can be amended before the elections, said Prof Ali Riaz, head of the Constitution Reform Commission, yesterday.

"But it depends on the decision of the government and political parties," he said during a press briefing at the commission office at the National Parliament, reports BSS.

Riaz said they have identified some problems and informed the government about this and hoped that the government will take a decision soon to make the necessary reforms.

In response to a question, he said whether the constitution will be amended through a referendum or not is also a matter for the consideration of the government and political parties.

"Although there are differences of opinion among political parties, I believe there is consensus among them on the reform issue. Whatever is needed for political change must come from within the parties and cannot be imposed from outside," he observed.

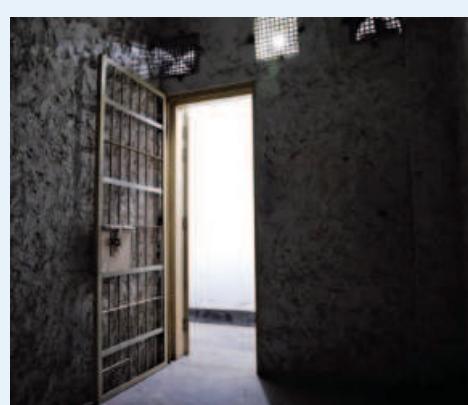
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Aynaghar: what happened to those still missing?

Family members demand answers, punishment for perpetrators

Why is that man (pointing to a man in the room) saying my father is dead? We still don't know... maybe he is somewhere else? God knows. How did my father stay in that cell? That cell is too tiny. How did he sleep?

Hridi, daughter of a victim



Rab and DGFI need to be disbanded -- there can be no reforms in these forces. We are not looking for just a few token convictions.

Rezaur Rahman Lenin, Human rights researcher.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With three of the secret detention centres finally unveiled, the families of the forcibly disappeared are faced with a difficult reality -- the loved ones they had been waiting for years are not there.

Year after year, as the families took to the streets again and again during the height of Sheikh Hasina's government's repression, as they faced the police and lived under strict surveillance, most of them held one iron-clad belief -- their family members were inside one of the many secret detention centres, imprisoned but alive.

The alternative was a far worse reality.

Sitting inside a dark seminar room at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, the families watched a virtual tour of three secret detention centres that were inspected by Chief Adviser Dr

Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday. The photos displayed were taken by the team at Netra News.

As the cameras and crowds cleared after the press conference, the families sat in a daze. Then, one by one, they started breaking down.

Alida Islam Hridi was two and a half years old when her father, Parvez Hossain, was abducted by Rab and forcibly disappeared.

Parvez, a Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal leader from the capital's Bangshal, was picked up from Shahbagh on December 2, 2013. For the past nine years, The Daily Star has documented Hridi demonstrating on the streets, holding a photo of her missing father.

Today, Hridi is a teenager and an eighth grade student. Leaning back against her chair, she sobbed quietly, away from the harsh glare of the cameras. She had just viewed the brutal 2-foot by 4-foot

cells of the Taskforce Intelligence Centre, where victims of enforced disappearance were kept by Rab.

"Why is that man (pointing to a man in the room) saying my father is dead? We still don't know... maybe he is somewhere else? God knows," she said. "How did my father stay in that cell? That cell is too tiny. How did he sleep?"

These same families had walked up to the headquarters of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) the day after Sheikh Hasina's government fell, demanding to be let in so they could rescue their loved ones.

The DGFI later issued a statement saying there were no detainees in the Dhaka facility.

The press conference yesterday was organised by Mayer Daak, a platform of families like Hridi's.

"Rab and DGFI need to be disbanded -- there can be no

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A group of women anxiously wait on the footpath for a TCB truck to arrive. They had been there since 8:00am, but by noon, there was still no sign of the truck. Many had also waited in vain the previous day, losing valuable work hours. With soaring market prices, these low-income individuals have no choice but to endure long waits to buy essentials from TCB trucks at subsidised prices. The photo was taken near Mohammadpur Bus Stand in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'We'll review nat'l security policies'

Says home adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Affairs Adviser Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday announced that they will hold discussions on national security policies, including the potential abolition of the Rapid Action Battalion and restrictions on the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence.

"All relevant stakeholders will meet to review and decide on various recommendations, including the abolition of Rab as proposed by the United Nations Office for Human Rights and limiting DGFI to military intelligence activities," he said.

The OHCHR had earlier recommended disbanding Rab and restricting the functions of BGB and DGFI.

The adviser came up with the remark while launching SB Immigration's new online app for visa on arrival and transit visa applications at his ministry. He said the citizens of 14 countries would be able to use the app.

"If the current system works effectively, foreigners will be able to obtain a visa on arrival within 10 minutes. If they submit their information online before arrival, it will be verified, and upon reaching Bangladesh, they will scan the code, make the payment, and receive the visa."

On passport issuance, the adviser suggested reconsidering the need for police verification to simplify the process. "To make the process easier, I am considering whether police verification can be omitted. If it remains necessary, arrangements will be made to streamline it."

NIKO GRAFT CASE Verdict on Feb 19

COURT CORRESPONDENT



A Dhaka court yesterday set February 19 to deliver the judgement in connection with the Niko graft case filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and seven others.

Judge Md Rabiu Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka passed the order after hearing closing arguments from both the prosecution and the defence, Belal Hossain, bench assistant of the court, told The Daily Star.

Defence lawyer Mohammad Ziauddin represented the BNP chief in the court in her absence as she is receiving treatment abroad.

Earlier, a total of 39 prosecution witnesses testified in the court.

ACC sues Mustafa Kamal, family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has filed four cases against former finance minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, also known as Lotus Kamal, and his family members for illegally acquiring assets worth Tk 165.59 crore and suspicious bank transactions amounting to Tk 849.78 crore.

ACC Director General Akhtar Hossain confirmed this at the commission's headquarters in Segunbagicha yesterday.

In each case, Kamal has been named as an accused. The other accused are his wife, Kashmery Kamal, and his two daughters, Kashfi Kamal and Nafisa Kamal.

'OPERATION DEVIL HUNT' 566 more held on fifth day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 566 more people were arrested in 24 hours till yesterday afternoon as part of the ongoing "Operation Devil Hunt".

Besides, 1,099 others, accused or wanted in previous cases, were also arrested during the same period, according to the home ministry.

The government launched the operation on Saturday to restore law and order following Friday night's attack on "students and people" in Gazipur.

On Wednesday, 1,686 people were arrested, including 591 as part of the drive.

On Tuesday, 1,775 people were arrested, including 607 as part of the operation. On Monday, 1,521 individuals were arrested, with 343 apprehended as part of the operation. On Sunday, 1,308 arrests were reported, but the PHQ did not provide a breakdown of the arrests.



13th DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Al Hajj Lt. Col. Hesamuddin Ahmed, psc (Retd), served as a Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh in various ministries. He was the Administrator of the Dhaka Municipality, Chairman of RAJUK and other important corporations.

Being the Founder President of the National Shooting Federation Bangladesh, the Founder Member and Founding Vice Chairman RAOWA, his contributions will always be remembered.

He was associated with UCEP Bangladesh, SAHIC and various sports and social welfare organizations. In recognition of his remarkable contributions in the field of Sports development and social welfare he was awarded the National Sports Award (2003), Atish Dipannik Gold Medal, Poet Sarojini Naidu Gold Medal, C R Das Gold Medal etc.

-Dearly Missed & Always Cherished by Wife, Son, Daughter, Daughter in Law & Granddaughters