'Neither my family nor I bought any land, flat when I was in office'

Says former adviser Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nahid Islam, who recently resigned from his role as the information adviser to the interim government, yesterday revealed that a little over Tk 10 lakh was deposited into his Sonali Bank account during his time in office.

In a Facebook post, Nahid explained that before assuming his advisory role, he did not have a bank account. To receive his government salary, he opened a savings account with Sonali Bank's Ramna Corporate Branch on August 21, 2024.

Nahid made the post following speculations and rumours on social media about his fortune.

In his post, Nahid attached two photos containing the account statement with a breakdown of transactions from August 21, 2024,

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Operators have been collecting tolls manually at Dhaka Elevated Expressway's Mohakhali ramp since the electronic toll plaza was destroyed during the 2024 mass uprising. With the debris still lying on one side, it may look like the ramp is closed. So, the toll collectors use a loudspeaker to announce that the ramp is open. This photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Digital law reforms hasty, lack transparency

Say six int'l rights orgs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six international human rights organisations have expressed concern over the lack of transparency and inclusive consultation with stakeholders in the Bangladesh interim government's efforts to reform digital governance policies and regulatory frameworks.

In a joint statement released on February 25, Access Now, ARTICLE 19, Human Rights Watch, PEN International, Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, and the Tech Global Institute said the government's "fast-tracked" approach mirrors the legislative tactics of the previous administrations.

The organisations warned that the Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2025 (CPO) and the Personal Data Protection Ordinance, 2025 (PDPO) fail to address deeper structural issues in cyberspace governance.

Instead of aligning with Bangladesh's constitutional and international human rights obligations, the proposed laws contain vague and overly broad provisions. These could be misinterpreted, misused, and abused, particularly to suppress human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society groups.

The organisations also raised concerns about the absence of inclusive stakeholder engagement or an evidence-based legislative process by the Interim Government of Bangladesh when considering certain reforms.

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Scuffle mars launch of new student org

FROM PAGE 1

In a latenight development, private university students, who have long been alleging their exclusion from all post-August 5 platforms and committees, blocked Bangla Motor for an hour till 10:45pm to protest "attacks" on them earlier in the day by supporters of the newly formed organisation.

Demanding immediate dissolution of the committee, they said they would hold demonstrations across private universities today. If their demand is not met, they would go for a "Dhaka Blockade" programme on February 28, the day a new political party is to be launched by members of SAD and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

For now, the Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad will be led by a six-member central committee. There will also be a six-member DU unit.

The launch of the committee was slated for 3:00pm, but private university students showed up at the venue an hour later to protest their exclusion, stating they had been sidelined despite their significant role in the July uprising.

Around 5:15pm, when former SAD coordinator Abu Baker Majumder, now convener of the Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad, was announcing the new student body's name and leadership, the private university students surrounded him before he could finish, and a scuffle broke out.

The demonstrators demanded the inclusion of Rifat Rashid, a DU student who was a July Movement coordinator, in the committee. He, however, was already included in the leadership but not in the position he desired.

It is not yet known why private university students fought for a DU student's position while protesting for their own recognition.

A student being beaten up near Mall Chattar on Dhaka University campus before the launch of the new student body Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Members of the new student body then brought out a procession from Madhur Canteen, but a clash ensued as they reached the Lecture Theatre building. Several private university students were injured.

Some were severely beaten up by members of the new group at Hakim Chattar at around 6:00pm. At least two students had to be taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Tariqul Islam, a student of the University of Information Technology and Sciences, said, "We also played an important role in the uprising alongside public university students. We're protesting here to ensure we are not excluded from the new student organisation."

Abu Baker said, "The organisation will work to fulfil students' expectations based on the spirit of the July uprising. Protests before the committee's announcement seemed driven by other agendas, but discussions will be held to address legitimate concerns."

Chhatra Sangsad

"Education, Unity, Liberation" is the motto of the new student organisation.

The central committee will be as follows: Abu Baker Majumder, convener; Tawhid Mohammad Siam, senior joint convener; Zahid Ahsan, member secretary; Rifat Rashid, senior joint member secretary; Tahmid Al Muddassir Chowdhury, chief organiser; and Ashrefa Khatun spokesperson.

The DU unit will have Abdul Kader as convener; Limon Mahmud Hasan as senior joint convener; Mohir Alam as member secretary; Al Amin Sarker as senior joint member secretary; Hasib Al Islam as chief organiser; and Rafia Rehnuma Hridi as spokesperson.

Abu Baker was also a member secretary of DU's now dissolved Gonotantrik Chhatra Shakti, led by Akhter Hossen and Nahid Islam.

Notably, Hasib, a key coordinator of SAD, was served a show-cause notice for publicly stating that the July uprising would not have been possible without arson and police killings.

On the other hand, Al Amin Sarker, who also played an active role in the uprising, was a former leader of the now banned Chhatra League.

In 2022, it was reported that he was the deputy secretary for scholarships at DU's Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall Chhatra League. However, he resigned from the post during the uprising.

True extent of bad loans emerges

FROM PAGE 1

Bad loans have increased sharply in some Shariah-based banks controlled by the controversial business conglomerate S Alam Group and in some other banks where Awami League-affiliated businesses had influence, said central bank officials.

Janata had the highest volume of bad loans in the banking sector at the end of last year: as much as 66.8 percent of the bank's total outstanding loans have turned bad.

Of the Tk 67,300 crore of Janata's defaulted loans, about Tk 23,000 crore is of Beximco's, which were classified in the last quarter of 2024.

S Alam Group is another major defaulter, with its defaulted loans at Janata Bank reaching Tk 10,200 crore. It was followed by AnonTex Group (Tk 7,800 crore) and Crescent Group (Tk 3,800 crore).

Not only have bad loans increased, but loan disbursements also rose sharply during the previous regime.

The focus should now be on recovering the money by selling collateral, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

"We have to learn from previous mistakes and avoid repeating them. There must be a willingness to fix the banking sector as intention is the key factor. For that to happen, long-term reforms are needed," he added.

Ensuring proper loan sanctioning, enforcing single borrower exposure limits, halting loan rescheduling and appointing administrators at troubled banks are necessary for the ailing sector, said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, at a recent event.

She also emphasised protecting central bank independence, ending bank bailouts through recapitalisation and a licence freeze for new banks.

Protests, chaos at BERC hearing

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and severely impact the national economy.

After the hearing, BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed assured attendees that all concerns would be taken into account before making a final decision.

BERC proposed increasing gas prices for new industries to Tk 75.72 per cubic meter, up from the current Tk 30. Existing industries would also be charged a higher rate if they exceeded their sanctioned gas load.

Earlier in the day, Petrobangla and six gas distribution companies presented separate but similar proposals, stating that industries with new gas connections would pay 50% of their bills at the existing rate and the remaining 50% at the proposed higher rate.

At the hearing, Prof M Shamsul Alam, CAB's energy adviser, strongly criticised the proposal, calling it "against the public interest," "illogical," and "unacceptable." He urged the authorities to reject it by Sunday to prevent mass protests.

"It is possible to lower gas prices by identifying the sectors from where the ousted government looted money and by reducing corruption in the sector," he said. "A public hearing should be held on how to reduce gas prices instead."

Business leaders and politicians also condemned the proposal.

Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, pointed out that the technical committee failed to assess the potential economic impact of the price hike. He demanded a separate hearing focused on price reduction strategies.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, blamed wrong policies and corruption for the crisis, arguing that a price hike was unjustified. "Businesses and industries are already struggling and there is no need to hike the gas price to add fuel to the fire," he said.

Former Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) president Mir Nasir Hossain called for an energy audit to determine the actual costs. "Even if we accept the price hike, who will guarantee uninterrupted gas supply?" he questioned.

Anwar-ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said the economy had been in decline since the previous government forcibly increased gas prices, leading to reduced investments and a 35% drop in factory production capacity.

"The cost of importing fabric from India has become cheaper than producing cotton locally. Do we want to increase our dependence on India in this sector?" he asked.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the previous government raised gas prices by over 150% in one go, placing a massive financial burden on industries.

"As a result, a factory that used to pay Tk 2.1 crore per month in gas bills now pays Tk 5.25 crore," he said, calling the decision "self-destructive" for Bangladesh's industries.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), urged not to take steps that may jeopardise businesses here and aid the neighbouring countries.

"We are trapped in our investments here," he said, demanding tax reductions and lower gas prices.

Other industry leaders echoed similar concerns. Bangladesh Steel Mills Association President Mohammad Jahangir Alam suggested aligning industrial gas prices with those charged to power plants.

Ceramic Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Moynul Islam warned that higher gas prices could shut down ceramic industries, which rely heavily on gas.

"We need an uninterrupted gas supply before any price hike," he urged.

Ex-Shibir leaders to stay away

FROM PAGE 1

"I will not be part of the new youth-led political party to be launched on February 28. I had already informed party leaders about my decision a week ago," wrote Zonaed, a joint convener of the Nagorik Committee.

He said he had chosen to remain silent for the sake of broader unity and to keep the nation's focus on the new party. "Since speculations continued, I want to make my stance clear," he added.

Zonaed did not cite any reason behind the decision. However, in a previous Facebook post, he criticised the way the leaders of the new party were being picked, saying it was "neither democratic nor inclusive".

Rafe, a joint member secretary of the Nagorik Committee, shared Zonaed's post and wrote, "I will also not be part of the political party... However, my political journey will not stop here."

Zonaed and Rafe made the announcement during their Beijing visit at the invitation of the Communist Party of China amid confusion over their inclusion in the 22-member delegation of Bangladeshi political parties.

The Nagorik Committee in a statement claimed it was unaware of the visit and had received no formal invitation. It said if any individual claims to represent the Nagorik Committee without approval, their actions are not linked to the platform.

In another statement last night, Samanta Shermeen, spokesperson for the Nagorik Committee, announced the abolishment of the organogram of the organisation, the executive committee, cells, and search committee ahead of the launch the new party.

The membership of central committee members joining the upcoming political party will be cancelled when they are included in the party tomorrow. The others will remain on the committee.

The convener, member secretary, spokesperson, and chief organiser will perform their duties informally for the next 15 days from February 28. On their initiative, a formal forum of three members of the Nagorik Committee will determine the next organogram.

"After the formation of the party, the Jatiya Nagorik Committee will remain as a civil-political platform. It will not take any initiative to form any other party.

"In addition, the Jatiya Nagorik Committee will always work resolutely and actively in the future for the country and the interests of the people," the statement said.

Meanwhile, two other former Shibir leaders in the Nagorik Committee also said they would not join the new political party. They are Arefin Mohammad Hizbullah, former co-spokesperson of the Nagorik Committee, and Nayeem Ahmad, an organiser of its central committee.

Arefin alleged that former Shibir leaders are being excluded from the top positions of the new party solely due to their past association with Shibir, the pro-Jamaat-e-Islami student body.

Two leaders of the office cell of the Nagorik Committee confirmed that Arefin submitted his resignation to the convener. However, it was not accepted, they said.

The Nagorik Committee group comprising former Shibir activists demanded Zonaed be given the new party's member secretary post. Two other groups wanted Nagorik Committee Convener Nasiruddin Patwary or Member Secretary Akhter Hossen to hold the second-in-command position in the party.

To smooth over the discord, which even caused the deferral of the new party's launch by two days, the leaders decided to create a senior joint convener post for Zonaed in the new party and another important position for Rafe, said two leaders of the Nagorik Committee.

However, Akhter is all but confirmed as the member secretary of the new party. Two leaders of the Nagorik Committee told this newspaper yesterday that they were contemplating creating a chief coordinator post for Nasiruddin in the new party.

Additionally, Sarjis Alam, chief organiser of the Nagorik Committee, and Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the Students Against Discrimination, are set to take on the roles of chief organiser and spokesperson of the new party.

The new party is all set to be launched at the capital's Manik Mia Avenue at 3:00pm tomorrow.

Yesterday, the Nagorik Committee sent a letter to Dhaka Metropolitan Police, informing them of the event.

Sources in the two platforms said they would invite all political parties involved in the 2024 uprising, including the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami.

No one from the government will be present. Nahid Islam, a key coordinator of the student movement, resigned from his government adviser post on Tuesday as he is expected to hold the new party's convener position.

Initially, the committee may consist of 150 members, which could later be expanded to 300.

The name of the party has been kept secret. However, the leaders said the name might include the word "Nagorik" (citizen).

There are also proposals to include the words "Janata" (People) or "Biplobi" (Revolutionary).

It may take up to two years to hold the party's first council and the convening committee will lead the party into the next parliamentary elections expected to be held in December.

Polls likely by end of this year

FROM PAGE 1

who called on him at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka.

Yunus also sought Germany's help in implementing the reform initiatives taken by his government.

"We need all your support for the New Bangladesh. We are working hard to make the general election a success," he said.

Praising the German people and its economy, Prof Yunus expressed Dhaka's desire for a special relationship with Berlin to deepen trade and investment ties with Europe's largest economy.

"We have close relations with Germany, but we want a different relationship -- a special relationship -- with Germany," Yunus added.

"We have close relations with Germany, but we want a different relationship -- a special relationship -- with Germany," he added.

Zarah Bruhn, who is visiting Bangladesh to learn more about social businesses and microcredit, praised Prof Yunus' leadership, stating that Bangladesh would prosper during his tenure.

"I am a big enthusiast of your work," she said, adding that she is eager to launch social businesses in Germany.

The two also discussed the Three Zero Movement launched by Prof Yunus, social businesses, poverty reduction initiatives, and the future of welfare states.

Lamiya Morshed, senior secretary and head of SDG Affairs at the Bangladesh government, also attended the meeting.