




A systematic cover up of bodies

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Akram and former Gazipur Detective Branch inspector Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, have since been arrested over Ridoy's killing. The case now sits before the International Crimes Tribunal.

A MASSACRE
As Ridoy bled out in Gazipur, a massacre unfolded in Savar's Ashulia. Since the morning of August 5, Sheikh Hasina's final day in power, police were shooting relentlessly, blocking protesters from marching to Dhaka. Bodies were dropping one after another, blood soaking the streets.

“We went to the Konabari Police Station the next day. All we could find was the lungi Ridoy was wearing underneath a desk,”

MD IBRAHIM
Ridoy's brother-in-law.



A video that later emerged shows six bodies, bloodstained and barely covered, lying stacked on a van in front of Ashulia Police Station. One man was still moving and breathing, his fingers twitching. In the video, later authenticated by fact checkers, Dhaka District Detective Branch Inspector Arifat Hossain is seen walking past. Beside him stands Masudur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station. Then—flames. The bodies burn. At least one of these victims, the


one who was still seen moving and breathing, was certainly burned alive. Their remains were subsequently dumped in Ambagan graveyard, next to the police station. The next day, the graves were opened, and six charred bodies were pulled from the earth. Families identified four of them—Ash-Sabur, Sazzad Hossen Sajal, Tanjil Ahmed Sujoy, and Baygid Bostame. Their fates barely recognisable, some were identified only by their clothes and identity cards. The remaining two bodies are completely unrecognisable and have been sent for DNA profiling after families contacted police, said Kamal Hossen, inspector (investigation) of Ashulia Police Station. The International Crimes Tribunal is now investigating this case. DB Inspector Arifat Hossain and ex-additional SP of Dhaka Abdullahil Kafi have been arrested over this incident. The attempted cover-up in Gazipur and Savar is only the tip of the iceberg. The UN report on the July uprising says that there are cases where “police collected bodies of unidentified victims, and it is unclear to what extent the bodies were later handed over to morgues and duly reported to health authorities.” About the burning of bodies, the report says that police did so to “create the false impression that the victims had been killed by protesters.” Meanwhile, at least 5 protesters from Savar still remain missing. Tamim Sikder, Moniruzzaman Milon, Omor Faruk and Abul Hossen went missing on August 5 from near Ashulia police station. Shahadat Hossain, a day labourer, remains missing since August 4, fellow protesters and family members said.

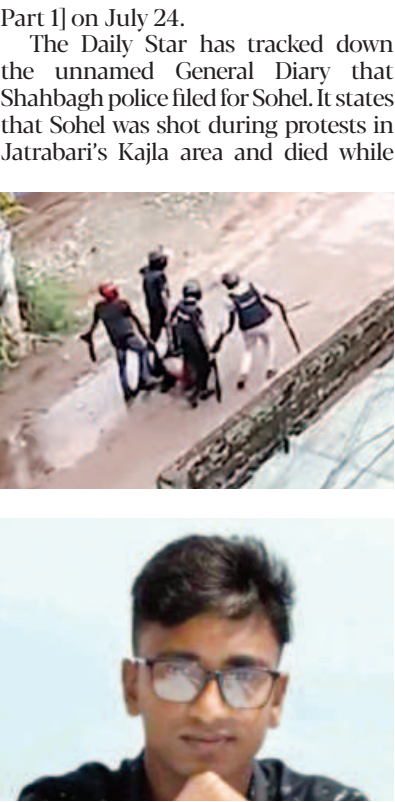
FAMILIES DENIED TIME

TO FIND BODIES
Sohel Rana, 28, went missing on July 18 near Jatrabari. His younger brother, Md Nabil, stepped out the next morning to look for him but could not go far. Jatrabari was a warzone. The government enforced a countrywide curfew that night, and the internet had been shut down. Nabil still went out the next morning again to search for his brother, but got assaulted by the cops. He finally found his way inside Dhaka Medical College Hospital on July 21, risking his life amid curfew. “There were bodies stacked on top of each other. Each freezer had two bodies in it,” he said. But he could not find his brother among so many bodies. Nabil returned to DMCH and visited Anjuman Mufidul Islam, a burial service, multiple times before August 5, but found no luck. Sixteen days after Sheikh Hasina's fall and 34 days after Soheli disappeared, Nabil found his brother's photograph at DMCH on August 21. Later, he rushed to Anjuman only to find that his brother, along with eight others, was buried at an unmarked grave in Rayerbazar [Read more in

“Sohel was detained, beaten, and shot multiple times at point-blank range. When the police left, I saw he still had a pulse. I rushed him to Dhaka Medical.”

AN EYE WITNESS on the killing of Soheli in Jatrabari on July 18





Police drag Ridoy, *bottom left*, through the streets towards Konabari Police Station after shooting him. On the right, several bodies are piled up on a pickup in Ashulia moments before police set them of fire.

receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical's emergency ward on July 18. We also obtained Soheli Rana's inquest report. It says he died from multiple pellet wounds near the chest. Bruises on his back and other parts suggested possible torture before death. From documents gathered from DMCH, we located a hijra community member who took Soheli to Dhaka Medical. “Soheli was detained, beaten, and shot multiple times at point-blank range. When the police left, I saw he still had a pulse. I rushed him to



Sector 7. Video footage verified by this newspaper shows Turag Thana Chhatra League Vice-President Murtala Bin Omar, alias Sathil, wielding a shotgun, firing indiscriminately at protesters in Uttara that day. With him were Jubo League leader Soheli Rana, councillors Yuvraj and Naim, and Yuvraj's son Leon, according to protesters, locals and the July Revolutionary Alliance, a student platform documenting the massacre. Several shots, fired by Sathil,

hit Assadullah, according to three protesters and the CCTV footage seen by The Daily Star. Assadullah's family received a call from a protester that night saying he had been shot. The curfew had already been announced. The next morning, his wife Farjana Akter went to Uttara Crescent Hospital and then DMCH to find him. When she was looking for her husband in the morgue, emergency section, and other wards of DMCH, Assadullah was still alive. He was receiving treatment at the hospital's burn unit, according to CCTV footage seen by this newspaper. There, lying in a bed, he took his last breath on July 22. Two days later, he was buried at Rayerbazar in an unmarked grave. Meanwhile, Farjana kept looking. Sathil faces at least 11 cases over murder during the July uprising, locals and police sources said. Sathil and the rest of the AL activists seen in the video are now on the run, and could not be contacted for comment. On July 19, the same day Assadullah was shot, Faisal vanished from Uttara, and Rafiqul from Gopibagh. They too, were buried in Rayerbazar on July 24 as unclaimed bodies. A request for burial sent to Anjuman from Shahbagh police station, along with pictures of the bodies, writes, “As no one claimed these individuals, we are handing over the bodies to Anjuman Mufidul Islam for burial.” But the fact is, families were still looking for their loved ones—they only did not know where to find them. [Our Savar Correspondent Aklakur Rahman Akash and Tangail Correspondent Mirza Shakil Contributed to this report] Read part 4 tomorrow on the agonising wait of the families for the bodies of their relatives.

UN calls for more int’l funding

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“That would be an unmitigated disaster. People will suffer and people will die.” Guterres, wearing a white panjabi, and Yunus had iftar with thousands of Rohingyas and members of the host community in Cox's Bazar broke Ramadan fast. The Rohingyas greeted the two by waving hands as they arrived at the Camp 20 Extension at 5:35pm. Later, they joined the Ramadan Solidarity Iftar with one lakh Rohingyas. Many carried placards with slogans like “UN take us to our home back”, “UN ensure our safe and dignified return”, “We are Rohingya, not stateless” and “No more refugee life”. Over the last eight years, after the brutal Myanmar military crackdown in 2017, not a single Rohingya has volunteered to return to Rakhine State, arguing that there is no security, guarantee of citizenship and basic life. Their return has become more uncertain with military-rebel conflicts in Rakhine. In his address to the Rohingyas, Yunus thanked the UN chief for coming to listen to the refugees so that a solution can be found. He

sought to work with Guterres to resolve the issue swiftly. The Rohingyas who met the chief adviser told him they have land in Myanmar and could make a living there. “We came here because we were not allowed to stay in our own country. We do not want to be a burden to anyone,” one of them said. Guterres said all must recognise the enormous support of the Bangladeshi people sharing their land, forests, scarce water and meagre resources with the refugees. Recalling his last visit to Cox's Bazar in 2018, Guterres said the camps had seen many improvements, but the challenges were still great. “These camps – and the communities that host them – are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Summers are scorching, and the chance of fires skyrocket. In the cyclone and monsoon seasons – floods and dangerous landslides destroy homes and lives.” Guterres said he spoke with many Rohingyas and was inspired by their courage and moved by their determination. Many shared harrowing accounts of their ordeals in Myanmar and their journeys here.

“They want to go home. Myanmar is their homeland. And returning in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner is the primary solution to this crisis.” He urged all parties in Myanmar



Rohingya refugees gather to listen to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres during his visit to a refugee camp in Cox' Bazar's Ukhiya yesterday.

to exercise maximum restraint, prioritise the protection of civilians in accordance with international

humanitarian law, and prevent further incitement of communal tension and violence in order to pave the way for democracy to take root. “But the situation in Myanmar remains dire, including in Rakhine State. Until the conflict and systematic persecution in Rakhine end, we must

support those who need protection.” In addition to food, the Rohingyas in Bangladesh are also hungry for education, skill-building, and opportunities for self-dependence. When prospects are limited, violence, crime, and other security issues naturally rise. Some Rohingya families feel they have no option but to risk everything on perilous sea journeys to reach wealthier countries, he said. “So we have a special obligation to ensure the aid reaches Rohingya refugees, and show that the world hasn't forgotten them.” UN and other aid agencies are confronting the prospect of enormous funding cuts. This will have a direct and dire impact on people, and the entire refugee population depends on humanitarian aid, Guterres said. “I repeat: Cox's Bazar is ground zero for the impact of budget cuts on people in desperate need. “Here it is clear, budget reductions are not about numbers on a balance sheet. Funding cuts have dramatic human costs. “Ultimately, the solution must be found in Myanmar. We will not give up until conditions allow for the

voluntary, safe and sustainable return for the refugees here. Until then, I urge the international community to step up.” Earlier in the afternoon, Guterres visited the Rohingya Cultural Centre in Camp 18 of Ukhiya, spoke to Rohingya women, saw the handicrafts made by the Rohingyas and appreciated their skills. During an interaction, a Rohingya youth called for the UN to draw attention of the international community to come to their aid and protect them until they are able to return to Myanmar. “We want a safe zone for us in Rakhine,” he said. As people were gathering for the iftar, a 43-year-old Rohingya man died and several others were injured during a stampede inside the camp, reports UNB. Guterres arrived in Bangladesh on Thursday afternoon on a four-day visit. Today, he will be attending events with the youths and civil society members in Dhaka before attending an iftar party to be hosted by Yunus. The UN chief will fly back to New York on Sunday morning.

‘We’re here to support your reforms’

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country's democratic transition and implementation of the political, judicial, electoral, administrative, anti-corruption, and police reforms. He said that election could be held in December provided the political parties agree to “a short package” of reforms, but it will be held by June next year if the parties settle for “a larger package”. The chief adviser reaffirmed his commitment to holding “free, fair, and participatory elections”. Shedding light on the Rohingya issue, the UN chief said, “I've never seen a population so discriminated against. The international community is forgetting the Rohingyas.” “[Aid] cuts are a crime,” he said, adding that Western nations were now doubling up on defence spending while humanitarian aid is squeezed across the globe. Guterres also expressed the UN's “enormous gratitude” to Bangladesh

for hosting the Rohingyas refugees. “Bangladesh has been extremely generous to the Rohingyas people.” “Rohingyas are a special case for me.” Yunus thanked the UN chief for visiting the country at such a crucial time. “You couldn't come at a better time. Your visit is timely not only for the Rohingyas people but also for Bangladesh,” he said. Yunus sought the support of the secretary general for the dignified return of the Rohingyas to their homeland in the western Rakhine state in Myanmar and in the meantime mobilising adequate food and humanitarian assistance for the 1.2 million refugees. “We are trying to raise attention of the plight of the Rohingyas people. The world should know how they are suffering. There is a feeling of frustration,” he said. The UN chief said he would do his

best to resolve the Rohingya crisis and would try to mobilise support for them with priority. He also lauded the contribution of the Bangladesh peacekeeping forces in maintaining peace and stability in some of the troubled corners of the world. “Bangladesh peacekeeping forces are very important for us,” the UN chief said, adding that their engagements have been “extraordinary”, and “Bangladesh acts in the frontline for a fairer world”. Yunus also praised the Bangladesh peacekeepers, saying that Bangladesh military gets unique exposure in these assignments. “The deployments mean a lot to us.” Geopolitics and the status of Saarc and Bangladesh's relationships with neighbours also featured in the talks with the chief adviser. He said Bangladesh also wants to become a member of the ASEAN in efforts to boost trade and investment

with the Southeast Asian nations. The chief adviser also highlighted his proposal to create a South Asia grid involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and India to for importing hydropower from the Himalayan nations. He said Bangladesh is building a series of ports in the country's Chattogram region in a bid to transform the country into “an economic hub”, connecting Bangladesh with the landlocked countries of Nepal and Bhutan and India's Northeastern region. Yunus said the interim government has been fully supported by almost every country in the world, including the United States, European Union, China, and Japan. About the state of the economy, the chief adviser said his government has inherited a ruined economy with a broken banking sector, dwindling reserves, and destroyed institutions. “The economy has now been

solidified. Exports have been growing for months. Foreign exchange reserves are also better.” Yunus said Bangladesh economy has made a turnaround to an extent that the interim government has now decided the country would make graduation from LDC nation next year. “We are taking full preparations for LDC graduation.” The chief adviser also outlined his government's efforts to bring back tens of billions of dollars stolen during the previous regime. He said that around \$234 billion dollars have been siphoned off during the last 16 years. “We are trying to get back the money. But this is a complex and lengthy process.” The UN chief said that it all reminded him of his time during the revolutionary days in 1974 in Portugal. Yunus also thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Volker Turk for the work of the UN Fact-Finding Mission, which documented atrocities and potential crimes against humanity committed by the Sheikh Hasina government. “He did a fantastic work. They documented the crimes just right after the atrocities were committed. Let them come back again and do more work.” Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, High Representative to the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh on Rohingya Issues and Priority Affairs Khalilur Rahman, and Senior Secretary Lamiya Morshed were present during the meeting. UN Under Secretary-General Rabab Fatima and UN Resident Coordinator to Bangladesh Gwyn Lewis were also there. Before this meeting, the UN chief also met Towhid and Khalilur at a city hotel.