

We will always stand by you

Army chief tells students injured in July uprising

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Addressing the students injured during the July uprising, Chief of Army Staff General Waker Uz Zaman yesterday assured them that the army would always be by their side and advised them never to lose morale.

The army chief made this remark while speaking at an iftar event organised by the Bangladesh Army at Sena Malancha in Dhaka Cantonment in honour of the students injured during the July uprising.

Waker exchanged greetings with the injured students and inquired about their well-being.

During his address, he emphasised that the primary purpose of the event was to remind the injured individuals that the army would always stand by them.

“Many of them are severely injured, some cannot move, and some have lost their eyesight. I assure you that we will always be by your side,” said the army chief.

He further mentioned that financial aid and other forms of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman shakes hands with one of the students injured during the July uprising at an iftar event held in their honour at the Sena Malancha in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: ISPR

Unease at NCP over Hasnat, Sarjis’s posts

FROM PAGE 1

Sarjis Alam, NCP’s chief organiser (north), then fuelled the debate further with a statement on Facebook just after noon yesterday.

While reaffirming solidarity with Hasnat as a fellow activist, Sarjis warned that publicly disclosing details of such discussion “might create trust issues in future critical dialogues with any stakeholder”.

Clarifying that they were not summoned, Sarjis said they went to the cantonment to discuss with army chief General Waker Uz Zaman whether his National Martyred Army Day speech signalled any concerning developments. In the speech, Gen Waker warned against “mudslinging and fighting”.

“Regarding the subject of exerting ‘pressure’ on a ‘refined Awami League’, I did not sense that there was any pressure. Instead, the army chief confidently said that if a refined version of the Awami League didn’t emerge, it would create long-term issues for the country and political parties,” Sarjis said.

“The tone portrayed in Hasnat’s post seemed more extreme than the actual conversation, though certainly more straightforward and so confident than usual. It was clearly stated that the participation of a refined Awami League in elections is essential for national stability.

“I didn’t feel the chief was angry; rather, he spoke from the perspective of someone senior, emphasising his long experience compared to us juniors.”

He also criticised attempts to

endorse any narrative pitting the army chief against Hasnat. “Their positions and contexts are entirely different ... Also, statements in some quarters calling for the army chief’s resignation do not reflect our position.”

Meanwhile, Abdul Hannan Masud, senior joint chief coordinator of NCP, slammed both Hasnat and Sarjis in the comment section of Sarjis’s post on Facebook. Their actions were “dragging the NCP into controversy,” Hannan wrote.

“What is this, brother!! I’m saying this publicly—one of you is lying. This cannot continue,” he added.

At least three NCP leaders told The Daily Star that Hasnat and Sarjis’s Facebook posts, along with Hannan’s comments, caused discomfort within the party.

Many central committee members have expressed their resentment in the party’s internal social media group, criticising the practice of holding meetings with various figures and publicly disclosing those without consulting the NCP leadership.

“Majority of the NCP leaders were unaware of Hasnat and Sarjis’s meeting with the army chief. When Hasnat publicly revealed on Facebook that the army had proposed rehabilitating the Awami League, reactions within the party were mixed. While many praised Hasnat for his firm stance against the Awami League, questions arose after Sarjis’s post that disclosed further details of the meeting,” an NCP leader told The Daily Star.

Requesting anonymity, the leader also said that as a newly formed political party, the NCP would likely have to engage in both formal and

informal discussions with various figures in the future.

“However, Hasnat and Sarjis’s decision to disclose details of an informal conversation on Facebook may discourage others from engaging in off-the-record discussions with NCP leaders, which could harm the party.”

Another senior leader pointed out that many within the NCP were still involved in social media activism, and they were yet to fully embrace the political identity.

“The party forum would soon discuss the issue of leaders making political statements on Facebook and work toward establishing internal discipline on such matters,” he said.

The party’s Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin denied any “distance or a lack of understanding” among the leaders. “Many students involved in the uprising are transitioning into the political sphere. If any mistakes have occurred in this process, I urge the people to view them with a forgiving attitude,” he said at a programme in the capital yesterday.

He also said the party would soon address the matter in a press release.

Sweden-based Netra News early yesterday reported that the army, in response to its query, confirmed the March 11 meeting. The report said the army dismissed Hasnat’s claims as “absolutely laughable”, calling his post “nothing but a complete political stunt”.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) said that they were not aware of the Army Headquarters comment and Netra News report.

Trade and investment top priority

FROM PAGE 14

interest,” he said.

Indeed, Dhaka is more interested in enhancing economic cooperation and discussing regional challenges, including Rohingyas, The Daily Star has learnt from foreign ministry officials informed with the proceedings.

Dhaka and Beijing have been working on signing at least eight memoranda of understanding, including on trade, culture, modernisation of Mongla Port and water management during the four-day tour that begins on March 26.

“This would be a very successful, productive, and milestone visit with some announcements,” Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen told the media after a meeting with Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin at the foreign ministry yesterday.

Dhaka will be making the same proposals as it did during Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain’s visit to China in January, said Mahfuz Kabir, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS).

During Touhid’s January visit, he had requested lowering the interest rate on Chinese loans from 2.3 percent to 1 percent, waiving the commitment and management fees and extending the loan repayment period from 20 years to 30 years for both the preferential buyer’s credit and government concessional loans.

The Chinese side had agreed in principle to extend the repayment period for Chinese loans and assured Dhaka of looking into the request to lower the interest rate.

However, it all depends on the strength of the negotiations, Kabir said.

“There could be some MoUs signed, but substantial boost in trade and investment or concessions

in loans will largely depend on political stability, even though China maintains relations with any government of the time,” said Imtiaz Ahmed, also a former professor of Dhaka University’s international relations department.

Attracting Chinese investment to Bangladesh’s Special Economic Zone in Chattogram will be a major agenda, said foreign ministry officials.

Bangladesh will encourage Chinese companies to relocate their factories to Bangladesh, especially the sunset companies as China faces global trade barriers, Chief Adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam told the media last week.

If these companies manufacture in Bangladesh, they can export without restrictions, he said.

China is the Bangladesh’s largest trading partner, with the volume being \$25 billion a year. However, Bangladesh’s exports to China amount to less than \$1 billion, though China provides Bangladesh with zero-tariff market access.

As part of the efforts to narrow the trade gap, China will be importing mango, guava, and jackfruit in big quantities, Yao said.

A new area of cooperation began with China since Touhid’s visit in medical tourism, at a time when India has substantially tightened visas for Bangladeshis.

He had requested China to dedicate hospitals for Bangladeshi patients in Kunming. The first batch of 14 patients went to China in early March this year.

Dhaka has also proposed that China should set up a high-quality hospital chain in Bangladesh, a proposal that is being positively considered by China, a foreign ministry official said.

The establishment of high-quality

hospitals in Bangladesh will be a milestone in Sino-Bangla relations, Prof said.

River water management will be another agenda during Yunus’ visit, according to foreign ministry officials.

In 2023, China proposed implementing the Teesta river management project in phases, but Bangladesh did not go ahead with it.

Yao recently told the media that China was ready to implement the project.

Dhaka may also raise the issue of China’s plan to build a mega-hydropower dam across the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet, which can have implications on the lower riparian countries, including India and Bangladesh.

According to the officials concerned, China will propose that Bangladesh should join the Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative.

Dhaka may not go for any project that stoke geopolitical tension, said Kabir of BIIS.

“Also, the fact that this is an interim government, it may think twice before going for any such issue,” he added.

Dhaka will definitely seek China’s strong role in addressing the Rohingya crisis that has become complicated with the Arakan Army taking control of about 90 percent of Rakhine state, said a foreign ministry official.

“Something like the Marshall Plan is required for addressing the Rohingya crisis, and a global or regional approach would work better towards this end. Similarly, there may be a consortium of different countries to address the Teesta water issue,” Prof Imtiaz said.

BNP opposes two-term cap on PM

FROM PAGE 1

women to 100 but sees no need to change the current election system for women candidates.

The party rejects the proposal of nominating 10 percent youth candidates in the lower house, saying choosing candidates should be up to the parties.

It also rejected the proposal to nominate the PM by the majority of the lower house members.

The BNP dismisses the proposal to lower the minimum age to run for office to 21 years.

However, it supports the recommendation of having two deputy speakers, one of whom will be from the opposition.

The BNP disagrees with the proposal of constitutional amendments based on two-thirds majority in both lower and upper houses followed by a referendum.

It is not realistic to make all constitutional amendments through referendums, says the party. The BNP thinks it is unnecessary to change the name, The People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

It disagrees with the commission’s recommendation to adopt – equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism and democracy – as fundamental principles; and rejects the proposal that the state must

ensure pluralism, multiple religions, multiple languages and multiple cultures and the coexistence of all communities.

The party suggests that the articles of the constitution that outline the fundamental principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, should be restored to the pre-15th amendment form.

BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters that it was not right to equate the 1971 Liberation War and the 2024 mass uprising.

“One of the most important parts of the constitution, which appears on the very first page, is the preamble. There is a proposal to completely change it... In this, the 1971 Liberation War has been equated with the mass uprising of 2024, which we do not consider appropriate,” he said.

The preamble is a vital part of the constitution and the commission’s suggestion to completely alter or revise it is akin to rewriting it.

PROPOSALS ON OTHER REFORMS
The BNP thinks the independence of the Election Commission will be harmed if some of the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Commission are implemented.

The BNP believes that the power to draw the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and the national identity card service should remain

with the EC.

If the NID is handed over to a separate independent institution, then the EC will have to rely on that institution repeatedly, said Salahuddin.

About public administration reform, Salahuddin said there were 26 proposals. “We agree with nearly half of them, and for the remaining half, we have our opinions and comments. Through detailed discussions, we can reach a consensus on these matters.”

About the Judiciary Reform Commission’s proposals, he said their party agreed with almost all the proposals.

The BNP does not agree with the proposal to grant the parliamentary standing committee the power to hold the EC accountable, he said.

Answering a question, he said the interim government should focus on the national election, not a referendum.

“We think the national parliamentary election should be held first.”

The BNP does not believe a constituent assembly is necessary for the extensive reform of the constitution.

Regarding the Anti-Corruption Commission reforms, he said there were about 20 proposals, of which the party agreed with 11.

NCP presses on for constituent assembly

FROM PAGE 1

“The third issue concerns two significant reform proposals by the Police Reform Commission and the Local Government Reform Commission. We were unable to give opinions on these [as they were not in the spreadsheet]. We want to know the commission’s stance in this regard.”

Tushar added that the NCP wants Bangla recognised as the official language, and constitutional recognition for all communities.

The party also believes the protection of life and nature should be a fundamental right.

It said that since a deputy speaker would be from the opposition, there would now be no need for two.

Tushar said that aside from the finance bill, MPs should be restricted from voting against a no-confidence motion against their own parties.

The NCP supports a bicameral parliament and suggests political parties announce their upper house candidates before elections.

“Since voters will cast only one vote, they have the right to know who will be appointed to the upper house,” Tushar said.

The party opposed dividing the country into provinces and the educational qualification

requirement for Senate candidates, arguing it would exclude marginalised communities.

It proposed that while the prime minister could advise the president, it should not be mandatory.

Regarding the interim government, the NCP said it should function as an election-time government for 70–75 days.

“Eventually, such a government may no longer be necessary, and the proposed Constitutional Council could take over,” Tushar added.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Bangladesh opposed certain constitutional reform proposals, such as removing fundamental principles from the constitution’s preamble and changing the country’s name.

“After reviewing the proposed preamble, it seems there is an attempt to equate the great Liberation War with the recent mass uprising. A dialogue among parties is needed,” said CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince after submitting his party’s opinions.

The CPB also criticised the commission’s spreadsheet, saying most questions were unclear, incomplete, and one-sided, requiring further explanation.

“Simply marking responses without discussions would not be

ICT investigators submit report on killing of 6 protesters in Ashulia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The investigation agency of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has submitted its probe report in the case filed over the shooting of six protesters and the subsequent burning of their bodies in Dhaka’s Ashulia on August 5, 2024.

This is the first investigation report submitted in one of the many cases filed over crimes against humanity committed during last year’s mass uprising.

ICT Chief Prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam shared the development with journalists at his office yesterday afternoon.

He said, “We’ve received the investigation report for one [Ashulia] case. In addition, the investigation reports for three to four other cases are being finalised. We expect to receive those reports after Eid vacation, at which point we will begin reviewing all findings before proceeding with filing formal charges. The trial will commence following the framing of these charges.”

However, Tajul did not disclose any details about the other cases. When asked, he expressed hope that one of them would include a case against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Regarding the Ashulia incident, he explained that after killing six people on August 5, their bodies were placed on a rickshaw van before being transferred to a police van and taken near Ashulia Police Station. There, the police poured petrol over the bodies and set them on fire.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

India knew of anti-Hasina wave

FROM PAGE 1

the uprising, as such an action would prompt the UN to ban the army from peacekeeping operations, the report said.

The Consultative Committee on External Affairs members met Jaishankar for a discussion on India’s foreign policy where Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan issues dominated.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, who has hosted a series of international dignitaries, is scheduled to visit China, where the two countries are expected to sign multiple agreements, including ones

on aviation links that will increase connectivity between Chittagong and Dhaka and Chinese destinations.

Jaishankar highlighted the role of “external actors” in Bangladesh and mentioned that China was “not an adversary but a competitor”.

He also discussed the future of Saarc, which has not met since November 2014, The Hindu report said.

Islamabad was supposed to host the 19th Saarc summit in November 2016, but the event was called off after India withdrew its participation following the terror attack on its military installation in Uri on

September 18, 2016.

Since then, India has supported the cooperation at the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), raising questions about the scope of Saarc’s revival.

However, Jaishankar hinted that “Saarc is not off the table” and that the regional grouping has been “paused”.

The MPs also sought an explanation about India’s move to counter China’s growing influence in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, added the report.