

MY DHAKA

Why Bijoy Sarani feels like Dhaka's true heartbeat

RBR

Dhaka doesn't have a city square per se, but places like Shahbagh and areas around Motijheel serve as a sort of one.

But in my opinion, the vibrant, colourful pavement adjacent to our Parliament building and the Bijoy Sarani thoroughfare can be a contender in the race to nominate a town square – one designated open space for the public to come and unwind.

The atmosphere of this prominent pedestrian area in Dhaka is electrifying, if I am to describe it simply.

I was crossing the area last Tuesday, which was a weekday, mind you, and the place was pulsating with activity; I had to stop and soak in the happy energy. Weekends must be extra fun.

I am not sure if I can find the correct words to describe the flurry of happenings on that joyful pavement. It was after office hours, and the sun hung low in the sky, emitting a golden orange hue of light.

The summer breeze soothed the day's tiredness. For me, it was a picture-perfect Dhaka moment – exactly how I want to see my beloved metro.

Groups of young office executives, university students, and friends were engaged in fun banter and serious office discussions, pulling each other's legs, and raucous laughter – just the way young people ought to be: carefree and joyful.

Their jubilant mood seeped into me and other elderly couples lazing in the sun.

Young ones in love, mothers and children, and loners seeking me-time – it was a motley crowd.

"I left Dhaka when I was 24. I was a tailor in Saudi Arabia for almost three decades. I have recently returned, and I am enjoying the mood here. When I left, the area around Sangsad Bhaban was barren, but look at it now," says Yasin, chewing on a sweet betel



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

leaf he bought from Asma, who was selling cigarettes and paan on that pavement.

Asma's makeshift shop was just a cigarette-selling tray, set on top of a wooden stool. She sat on the concrete under a big Bakul tree (Indian Medlar). Her no-nonsense attitude and well-brewed milk tea pull customers to her pop-up stand.

"I have been doing business here for the last eight years. I started the business with my own money, and I earn a decent living. Who is there to stop me from working just because I am a woman in a man's world?" she answered me when I asked if the men around her accept her presence.

There were quite a few young women selling cupcakes, alongside agar-agar jello with coconut shavings, which seemed to be a new kind of street food.

Sitting with a child in her lap, Amena, a young girl, was selling these baked desserts.

A young lad with developmental disability was selling ice-chilled fizzy drinks, water, and a traditional yoghurt drink called mattha.

Then there was the crowd-pleaser ghoti gorom

chanachur, which in exact translated words would mean a street snack of fried and crispy chickpeas, lentils, peanuts, and rice flakes – that are kept hot under a ghoti or pot, which in turn is kept warm with slow-burning wood dust.

It is a local treat along with Dhakaiya masala muri with ghunni chaat (puffed rice and chickpeas) and Jhal Muri.

The thing that I really appreciated was that the walkway is jammed with young and old independent retailers, hawking their unique items, handcrafted goods, clothing, and food.

It is an interesting place to relax and feel upbeat because the ambience there is very chilled.

What caught my attention was a teenager with a Boxing Arcade Machine. For just Tk 20, you can test



your punching power. He is surrounded by a crowd of young men keen to impress.

I must confess, I tried my hand and failed miserably, drawing sympathy from the gathering.

Part-timers and freelancers find this public area friendly for brisk business. Ordinary people find it a lively and happening place to loosen up and take a break at the day's end.

Next time you are in that vicinity, take the time out to explore the exuberance there.

Accomplices of 1971 war crimes must apologise

Says Mahfuj Alam

BSS, Dhaka

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Md Mahfuj Alam yesterday said that the issue of 1971 must be resolved, and the accomplices of war crimes must apologise.

"The Pakistani ideology will have to be ditched for participation in politics in Bangladesh," he said in Facebook.

He wrote the post titled "Two Words", whose first point was: "Pakistan has committed genocide in this country. (Even if Pakistan officially apologises, even if the country agrees to apologise again, accomplices of war crimes are yet to apologise). Making a narrative in favour of genocide for any excuse must be stopped. Sabotage of the July force, by infiltrating it, must be stopped. [You] have to come in with a clean heart."

In his second point, he wrote, "The pro-Mujib leftist forces will have no mercy. They are the brains behind the League's enforced disappearances and murders and massacres in the anti-Modi movement and at Shapla. They belong to the 36 Division."

The adviser also said, "They are still in their position, untouched despite their repulsive brokering during July. Till today, the pro-Mujib leftists are culturally and intellectually betraying July. They continue to plot against the forces of July staying in the country. All these B-teams of the League will soon be defeated. There is no use in relying on anyone else."

Earlier, in another post, he said, "The decision has been made to ban the activities of the Awami League. A provision has been added to the legal process to ban the party. The July Proclamation will be issued within the next 30 working days."

The government has decided to ban all activities of the Awami League until the trial of its leaders and activists is over at the International Crimes Tribunal.

This decision was taken in a special meeting of the advisory council Saturday night with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in the chair.



Lower tariffs, higher import of US goods on the cards

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The US share in global cotton export was 35.81 percent, and the import duty of US cotton in Bangladesh is zero percent, said a person who is familiar with the document.

Similarly, in 2023, Bangladesh imported propane or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) worth \$1.9 billion, of which \$51.32 million came from the US.

That year, the total worth of LPG exported by the US was \$20.88 billion, with Bangladesh accounting for 0.25 percent of this purchase. The tariff on LPG imports from the US is zero.

Similarly, primary estimates suggest that Bangladesh has a lot of room to import more soybean products, wheat, natural gas, gold, corn, human vaccine, jewellery articles, boards and panels from the

US.

The country would also offer to import products that the US exports heavily worldwide but currently hold a small share in Bangladesh's import basket, the document showed.

Those products are cotton, ferrous waste and scrap, natural gas, wheat, light oils, milk and cream.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said, "We have not received this document yet, although we are preparing our reply for the US government. We will send our reply to the United States Trade Representative (USTR) within two to three days."

Bangladesh will rationalise the tariff rates following the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) system of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as both the US and Bangladesh are

members. The MFN rate means that the rate given to the US must be the same for other countries as well.

The National Board of Revenue is working to find 100 goods on which Bangladesh can offer duty reduction, Rahman said.

Moreover, Bangladesh has already paid the arrears of three American companies and is getting ready to make full payment to Oracle, he added.

Bangladesh will also promise to reduce the non-tariff barriers for the ease of doing business and refrain from using counterfeit software in different offices.

During last month's meeting, the USTR suggested that Bangladesh source the goods directly from America. For instance, Bangladesh imports cars from General Motors

and LG goods from other countries such as Korea and India, although these are American brands.

Bangladesh will also give preference to Boeing when it purchases aeroplanes, Rahman said.

Meanwhile, in a letter sent to Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin on May 7, USTR Ambassador Jamieson Greer suggested that Bangladesh address areas of unfair trade practices, such as labour rights violations and measures that may restrict digital trade.

"My team is ready to engage with Bangladesh to address the persistent bilateral trade deficit by reducing Bangladesh's agricultural and industrial tariff and non-tariff barriers as well as aligning with the United States on economic security matters," Greer said in the letter.

Govt amends anti-terror law

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The Council of Advisers on Saturday decided to ban all activities of the Awami League under the Anti-Terrorism Act until the International Crimes Tribunal completed the trial of the party and its leaders for atrocities during the July uprising.

The ban aims to "ensure national security, protect leaders and activists of the uprising, and safeguard plaintiffs and witnesses involved in the tribunal proceedings", Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said on Saturday.

The decision to ban the Awami League's activities came after three days of demonstrations by the National Citizen Party (NCP) and several other political and student organisations.

Hundreds of people, including women and children, were killed during the uprising.

A fact-finding mission of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates that as many as 1,400 have been killed.

In a report in February, the mission said "serious human rights violations and abuses" committed by the security forces and armed Awami League supporters between July 15 and August 5, 2024, stemmed from a calculated effort to retain power at all costs.

Ousted prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina fled to India on August 5. Most of the party's top leaders are either hiding abroad or are in jail.

Formed in 1949, the Awami League is one of oldest political parties in the country. Earlier, in October last year, the government banned the party's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League, under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, amid demands from the student movement against discrimination.

EC DECISION AFTER GAZETTE

Asked about the fate of the Awami League's registration with the Election Commission as a political party, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin told The Daily Star that they would decide on the matter after officially receiving the government circular banning the party's activities.

"No decision on the matter can be taken without the government's circular, which must be taken seriously. Once we receive the exact order, we will review the legal aspects and determine the next steps accordingly," he added.

Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarker told this newspaper yesterday that the commission would

hold a meeting as soon as it got the circular.

EC officials said the commission was prepared to hold the meeting today. "It is almost certain that the commission will not go against the government's decision," said a highly placed source at the EC.

Since 2008, a total of 50 political parties have been registered with the EC, while five parties' registrations have been cancelled.

The Freedom Party's registration was cancelled in 2009 as it failed to provide the party charter.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's registration as a political party was declared illegal by the High Court in 2013. Following the verdict, the EC cancelled Jamaat's registration in October 2018. Jamaat's appeal against the High Court verdict is now pending with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

After 2018, Oikyabaddho Nagarik Andolan, Pragatashil Ganatantrik Party and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party lost their registrations as they failed to fulfil certain conditions.

HISTORY OF BAN

Throughout Bangladesh's political history, various parties and organisations have faced bans.

After independence, all religion-based political parties, including the Jamaat, were banned following the adoption of the country's constitution in 1972.

In a sweeping political move on January 25, 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dissolved all political parties, including the Awami League, and introduced one-party rule under Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League or BAKSAL. Following his assassination on August 15 the same year, all political activities were suspended under martial law.

Political activities resumed in 1976 following the lifting of the ban. During this time, some leaders revived the Awami League. In 1979, the then government allowed all previously banned parties, including the Jamaat, to re-enter the political arena.

During the Awami League's tenure in 2013, the High Court revoked the Jamaat's registration. Last year, the government banned the Jamaat and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, under the Anti-Terrorism Act. After the July uprising, the interim government lifted the ban in August.

Several organisations, including Purbo Banglar Sarbahara Party and the Purbo Banglar Communist Party, were banned under the 1974 Special Powers Act.

Parties welcome ban on AL activities

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(NCP), Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Hefazat-e-Islam, Islami Chhatra Shibir, Islami Chhatra Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Inquilab Mancha, Bangladesh Ganatantrik Chhatra Sangsad, and Amar Bangladesh Party.

The BNP yesterday expressed satisfaction over the government's move.

In a statement, the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "We are pleased that, albeit delayed, the interim government decided last night [Saturday night] to ban the activities of the fascist party Awami League and all organisations affiliated with it, in the interest of swiftly prosecuting those involved with the fascist regime for crimes against humanity and ensuring an unhindered trial process."

He added that the move to amend the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act to facilitate the prosecution of the fascist party was the right decision, as the AL had been involved in enforced disappearances, murders, oppression, and prolonged misrule.

"But had this decision been taken earlier as per our demand, the government would not have found itself in the embarrassing and undesirable position of acting under pressure."

Fakhrul noted that during a meeting with the chief adviser on February 10, they submitted a letter demanding that the Awami League be brought under judicial proceedings as a political party for genocide and crimes against humanity. At a subsequent meeting on April 16, they submitted another letter reiterating

the same demand and calling for the country's political arena to be "cleansed of filth".

The BNP leader said that during discussions with the chief adviser, the party had clearly stated that banning the fascist AL through a legal process was both possible and necessary.

"We have repeatedly raised this demand in various meetings, rallies, and discussions. It is worth noting that we, as a matter of principle, oppose banning political parties through administrative orders. In line with that stance, the BNP protested the previous fascist government's decision to ban Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami."

In his reaction, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said, "Our heartfelt demand has been partially fulfilled through the banning of Awami League's activities. But it has not yet been fully realised."

Regarding the trial of AL, he said, "We have repeatedly met with the families of the martyrs. They do not seek financial assistance from the government. Instead, they want swift justice against Sheikh Hasina and her accomplices," he told a street rally at the capital's Moghbazar intersection early yesterday.

The Jamaat ameer said the banning of AL's activities marked a partial fulfilment of public demands.

"The fallen autocrats, fascists and their aides must be brought to justice without delay. All legitimate demands of the people must be fulfilled. Zero tolerance must be shown towards the killers. The people want to see their punishment immediately."

Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser (South) of NCP, said protesters

welcomed the interim government's decision to ban all activities of AL.

He added they would remain vigilant during the implementation of the decision and urged all demonstrators occupying the Shahbagh intersection to return home until further notice.

While briefing reporters at Shahbagh around 3:30am yesterday, he said, "We have been witnessing various delays regarding the trial of the Awami League. Safe exits were being provided to Awami League men accused of genocide."

"Tomorrow [Sunday] is a government holiday. We have been informed that the official gazette [on the ban] will be issued the day after tomorrow [Monday]. On Monday [today], we will celebrate with a victory procession once the gazette is published."

Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim said yesterday that declaring a ban on Awami League's activities until judicial proceedings are completed was a step forward in freeing the country from autocracy.

However, he noted that the revolutionary masses had expected the Awami League to be permanently banned and urged the government to make sincere efforts to meet this public expectation.

"It is unfortunate that to secure a ban on the Awami League, the people had to launch a continuous movement under the scorching heat of Baishakh, even blockading important areas such as the chief adviser's residence. Nonetheless, we welcome the decision taken yesterday [Saturday night] by the advisory council. The people