

AZHARUL'S ACQUITTAL 15 hurt in clash between student groups in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least 15 activists of the Ganatantrik Chhatra Jote were injured yesterday in a clash between two student groups in Chattogram's Jamal Khan area over the acquittal of Jamaat-e-Islami leader ATM Azharul Islam in crimes against humanity cases.

Ripa Majumder, president of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front's Chattogram city unit, said activists of the Jote, a coalition of seven left-leaning student organisations, gathered near the Chattogram Press Club around 3:30pm to protest Azharul's acquittal and a previous attack on students at Rajshahi University.

"As we were putting up our banner, several hundred people — mostly Shibir activists and some from a faction of Students Against Discrimination — attacked us with sticks and brickbats," she said. "The police stood by silently," she alleged.

Ripa said at least 15 activists of the left-leaning coalition were injured in



Leaders and activists of Gonatantrik Chhatra Jote, a left-leaning student body, bring out a torch procession on the Dhaka University campus yesterday, protesting the acquittal of Jamaat-e-Islami leader ATM Azharul Islam in a crimes against humanity case.

PHOTO: STAR

Freed Azharul wants prosecution of those involved in war crimes trials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat leader ATM Azharul Islam yesterday demanded the trial of those involved in the "judicial killings" of party leaders executed for crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

"With a heavy heart, I am remembering those who are no longer with us. They were killed unlawfully. They are victims of judicial killing," he said while addressing a rally at Shahbagh.

"All individuals involved in these murders, regardless of their level of involvement, must be brought to justice," he demanded after he was released yesterday, a day after the Supreme Court cleared him of the charges of crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

He was freed from the prison cell at Bangladesh Medical University, formerly known as BSMMU, around 9:15am after his release process was completed by the authorities of Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

Soon after the release, the Jamaat leader joined the rally at Shahbagh intersection.

"After serving nearly 14 years in jail, I have been released today. I am free now... I am a free citizen of an independent country," he said.

He expressed his gratitude to the Supreme Court, his lawyers, participants of the July uprising — especially the students — members of the army, and the people of the country.

EU 'well on track' to reach 2030 climate targets

AFP, Brussels

The European Union is on track to reach its 2030 climate targets, Brussels said yesterday, but uncertainty remains over the bloc's ambitions to cut greenhouse gas emissions much further by 2040.

The European Commission expects emissions to fall by 54 percent by 2030 compared to 1990, very close to its 55 percent target, it said, after analysing member states' energy and climate plans for the coming years.

The EU, however, faces a tough balancing act.

It is seeking to boost European industry confronted by fierce competition in the United States and China, ramp up its defenses faced with Russia, and tackle climate change that is wreaking havoc at an alarming pace with wildfires and floods.

"The world is in a full geopolitical winter. But despite everything that is going on today, we do feel we have good news, and we're pleased to say that the EU is well on track to achieve its 2030 target," climate chief Wopke Hoekstra, said.

Election by June next

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The chief adviser also explained the situation of Rohingya refugees to Japanese lawmakers and sought their support to promote the agenda for Rohingya repatriation.

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, chief adviser's Special Envoy Lutfe Siddiqi and the senior secretary for SDG affairs, Lamiya Morshed, were also present at the meeting.

During the bilateral meeting with the Japanese prime minister tomorrow, Bangladesh will seek \$1 billion budget support.

At a dinner hosted by Nippon Foundation chief Yohei Sasakawa, Prof Yunus sought his cooperation to resolve the Rohingya crisis and ensure the safe repatriation of the displaced people of Rakhine, reports UNB.

The CA's deputy press secretary said Yohei Sasakawa visited Myanmar more than 150 times and is highly respected by the Myanmar government and the country's more than 100 ethnic groups, according to the CA's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder.

He said the two leaders discussed the Rohingya crisis, the evolving situation in Myanmar and the sharp decline of grants and aid to humanitarian crises across the globe in recent months.

Azad said the Chief Adviser stated that every year some 35,000 babies are born in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, and they are growing up without any hopes.

"Help us before it becomes explosive and dangerous for us," he said, adding that increasing smuggling of drugs has also worsened the security situation in the camps...we need to bring an end to the Rohingya crisis. This is a good moment. We can work together," Kalam said, quoting the chief adviser.

Azad said the Chief Adviser also sought support from the Nippon Foundation for life-saving healthcare research work of the ICDDR,B, which has been hit hard by the suspension of aid by the USAID.

Rooppur, MRT-1, Matarbari to get special focus

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The first 1,200MW unit is expected to come online in December this year, while the second unit is projected to start operations in December 2026, according to the latest progress report of the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

Once operational, the power plant would reduce dependence on smaller and more expensive power plants, such as those running on furnace oil.

The Rooppur plant is over 80 percent complete, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star in an interview recently.

A test run is expected by September or October, with one unit becoming fully operational by the year's end, he said, adding that the second unit is approximately 60 percent complete.

Additionally, five related projects — including transmission lines, a high-frequency telecommunications system and water supply — received Tk 2,166 crore in the upcoming ADP, down 10.6 percent year-on-year.

The five projects' total cost is Tk

17,471 crore, with Tk 6,792 crore spent as of June last year.

The MRT-1 project will receive the second highest allocation: Tk 8,631 crore, up from Tk 2,043 crore this fiscal year.

The 31.24-kilometre project, stretching from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Kamalapur via Purbachal, includes a 19.87-kilometre underground line. The Tk 53,977 crore project began in February 2023.

Besides MRT-1, two other JICA-funded metro projects — MRT-6 and MRT-2 — are also getting priority in the upcoming budget. Their combined allocation stands at Tk 2,837 crore, up 13.1 percent year-on-year.

The Matarbari Port Development Project will get Tk 4,068 crore in fiscal 2025-26, up 55.8 percent year-on-year.

The project cost was revised upwards by about 37 percent to Tk 24,381 crore shortly after the interim government took charge. Initially

launched in 2020, the project's deadline has now been extended to December 2029.

Ahead of his recent trip to Japan, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus stressed the importance of fast-tracking development in the Matarbari region with the view to turning it into the country's largest manufacturing and export-oriented free trade zone.

"We envision Matarbari as the nation's largest hub for ports, logistics, manufacturing and energy. To realise this vision, we must attract substantial foreign investment," he said.

In April, the Chittagong Port Authority signed a deal with a Japanese joint venture comprising Penta-Ocean Construction and TOA Corporation to construct a terminal for a deep sea port at Matarbari.

The terminal will enable the handling of mother vessels and reduce Bangladesh's dependence on transshipment ports for import and export cargo.

Get ready to ensure polls by December

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an election date despite being in office for 10 months. Caretaker governments in the past on the other hand had successfully organised general elections within three months.

"The fate of the election is trapped in a cycle of innovative conditions like the so-called small and large-scale reforms," said the BNP leader.

He said people have already begun to believe that certain individuals, both within and outside the government, might have a hidden agenda for stalling the polls in the name of reforms.

Jointly organised by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, and Swechchhasebak Dal, the rally titled "Establishing the Political Rights of the Youth" was scheduled to start at 2:00pm.

Tens of thousands of leaders, activists, and supporters started thronging Naya Paltan in large processions from Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sylhet and Faridpur since early morning.

Dressed in bright green, yellow, and red T-shirts and caps, they chanted slogans and waved flags.

The slogans mentioned BNP founder and late president Ziaur Rahman, whose death anniversary is on May 30, and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

A stage was set up directly opposite the BNP's central office, while many supporters occupied roads in adjacent areas, effectively bringing traffic to a halt. Heavy congestion was reported in many areas, with the crowd stretching as far as Motijheel.

Major thoroughfares witnessed tailbacks stretching for kilometres. Many commuters sweated inside packed buses, while others had to walk long distances.

Starting his speech after 5:00pm, Tarique emphasised the interim government's most valuable asset, its neutrality and credibility.

"Do not take any steps that would destroy the people's trust," he said, asking the government "not to turn pro-democracy citizens and political parties into opponents".

"If any of you [government advisers] wish to remain in power, resign from the government and join with the people. Run in elections. If you get the people's mandate, then assume government responsibility again."

Referring to a court verdict that cleared BNP leader Ishraque Hossain's path for taking oath as Dhaka South City Corporation mayor, Tarique said Ishraque was obstructed from taking charge by those who "showed no respect for the law".

He asked how much reform can people really expect from those who don't respect the law. "This is the same authoritarian mindset we've seen before."

He concluded his speech with a slogan: "Not Delhi, not Pindi, not any other country; Bangladesh first."

Addressing the rally, BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas alleged the interim government was "rotten from the top to bottom" and could "cause more harm than the Awami League if it remains in power".

"In these nine months, we have received nothing from this government — only disdain," he

said, claiming most members of the government are "not even citizens of the country".

On the proposed humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine, Abbas said, "There's no need to weigh profit and loss. We just want to remain as we are."

Abbas said, "What are you doing with Saint Martin's Island, the corridor, and Starlink? Do you think we don't understand? We do. Don't take the people of this country for fools."

Salahuddin Ahmed, another Standing Committee member, said, "We wanted election, not resignation [of Yunus]. But the people of Bangladesh have seen the drama over resignation. We want a roadmap for the national election."

He warned that ignoring democratic demands would mark "an unfortunate chapter in history".

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, another member of the BNP policy-making body, warned that the election issue "must not be taken lightly".

"This is a tsunami of youth. They are delivering a clear message for democracy," he said.

Regarding disagreements in the consensus commission's dialogue, he said, "If consensus is lacking, it is the people who will solve the problems."

Presided over by Jubo Dal President Monayem Munna, the rally was also addressed by senior BNP leaders Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Abdul Moyeen Khan and Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, among others.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, who is in Bangkok, shared a photo of the youth rally on Facebook. "We asked for a roadmap. It's been 10 months. You've spoken about everything except a roadmap. This omission seriously calls the intentions of the interim into question. As our acting chairman has clearly stated, December it is," he wrote.

PROMISES
Addressing the party leaders and activists, Tarique said, "I want to say repeatedly, go to the people. Try to know their expectations, try to understand their hopes, win the hearts of the people. Because the people are the source of all political power of the BNP."

Tarique said if the BNP assumes power, they will work on transforming the population into human resources through employment-oriented education, development of cottage and small industries, maximum use of information technology in rural development, creating employment opportunities through extensive training, and formulating short- and long-term plans to develop skilled manpower.

The BNP leader mentioned plans to introduce family cards for the poor and farm cards for marginal and landless farmers. He also talked about identifying sectors for job creation, introduce IT and vocational education in schools and colleges, include sports in the curriculum, and initiate foreign language education.

He said the BNP would launch government-run courses to produce plumbers, electricians, mechanics, dental hygienists, and medical technicians.

Grabbers feast on Sonadia forest

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August 5 last year, during a period of administrative transition.

"Opportunists took advantage of the situation and grabbed forest land due to a lack of oversight," he said.

Since taking office on December 5, 2024, the UNO said he has monitored the situation, deployed forces to prevent further encroachment, and conducted five drives against encroachers on Sonadia.

He said a detailed report on about 50 illegal occupiers has been prepared and will be submitted to the High Court soon.

He also said an estimated Tk 5 crore is needed to permanently remove the 45-kilometre-long embankments built for the shrimp enclosures on the island.

The UNO added that the trees might have been burnt in preparation for the upcoming shrimp cultivation season, but did not disclose the total area of forest destroyed since last August.

Requesting anonymity, another official of the upazila administration said the total destroyed forest area may well exceed the figures mentioned in DoE cases.

"If there are about 30-35 shrimp enclosures in the island and each enclosure has 70-100 acres of land, the encroached land may exceed 3,000 acres. In some estimates the total grabbed land may reach 4,000 acres," he said.

In the latest case filed on May 18, Md Abdu Salam, senior chemist at the DoE's Cox's Bazar office, said the latest encroachment occurred in the Paschimpara and Purbapara areas of the island.

"We found evidence that the grabbers set fire to felled mangrove trees to erase signs of destruction," Salam said.

The 20 named accused include Alamgir Chowdhury, general

secretary of Kutubjom Union BNP; Sheikh Kamal, chairman of Kutubjom Union Parishad; his brother Sheikh Alamgir; Abul Kalam, president of Ward 2 AL; Abdul Monaf, his nephew; Swechchhasebak League leader Intiaz Uddin; AL member Azizul Haque; Sonadia UP member Ekram Mia; Mohammad Shamsher Ullah, cousin of former MP Asheq Ullah Rafiq; and 12 others. An additional 25-30 unidentified individuals were also named in the case.

According to the case statement, the accused committed offences under the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act by destroying mangroves in an ecologically critical area (ECA), building embankments, establishing shrimp and salt farms, and harming flora, fauna, and natural land and water features.

Maheshkhal Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Kaisar Hamid said the DoE will investigate the case under the Environment Court Act 2010.

One of the accused, Sheikh Kamal Uddin, Kutubjom UP chairman and also an AL leader, denied his involvement. "I was on the run after August 5, so how would I destroy the mangrove forest?" he said. He claimed that his name had been included in the case by his political rivals to tarnish his image ahead of the upcoming union parishad election. He claimed to have joined anti-encroachment drives and said the encroachers are influential people of the Moheshkhal area, without identifying anyone.

Alamgir Chowdhury, secretary of Kutubjom union unit BNP, said the allegations against him were part of a conspiracy by his political rivals. Contacted, Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Water Resources Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan said the previous government

in 2017 allocated 9,467 acres of land on the island to the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) for an eco-tourism park.

The land grabbers had already started burning down the forest and setting up shrimp enclosures, she said, acknowledging that the destruction continued even after August 5 last year.

"After taking charge of the office, my first initiative regarding Sonadia was to bring the land back under the Forest Department's control from BEZA," she said.

She said only one step remains to complete this process as Cox's Bazar district administration has cancelled the allocation to Beza.

"Once the forest is officially recorded under the Forest Department, it can exercise legal authority in the area," said the adviser.

She said the last incident of forest burning occurred on April 27 this year.

"Joint forces have carried out several raids and demolished a number of shrimp enclosures there," she added.

"A full-scale operation is now required. The Cox's Bazar deputy commissioner has been instructed to lead the effort," she said, adding that local administration, navy, and other forces will take part in the major drive.

Asked about the fund needed for demolishing the embankments that encroachers built for their "ghers" [shrimp enclosures], she said, "The government is working to secure the necessary funds. The embankments built by the occupiers must be dismantled."

On May 5 this year, the government officially cancelled the land allocation to BEZA to help restore the island's environment and biodiversity.