

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR

ABU SAYED KILLING
ICT-2 accepts
the charges
against 30

Arrest warrant issued for
26, including ex-BRU VC,
police officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly a year after the killing of Begum Rokeya University student Abu Sayed, a martyr of last year's uprising, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 has taken cognisance of charges against 30 individuals, including senior university and police officials, accusing them of murder and crimes against humanity.

The accused, including the former vice-chancellor of BRU Md Hasibur Rashid, former Rangpur Metropolitan Police commissioner Md Moniruzzaman and 28 others, face charges of murder, attempted murder, abetment, and complicity in crimes against humanity.

Sayed was shot dead on July 16 last year, in Rangpur, during a student-led protest against the quota system in government jobs. The defiance he showed against oppression before his death turned the protests into a mass uprising that eventually toppled Sheikh Hasina's regime on August 5 last year.

This is the third case concerning the July-August 2024 crackdown in which the prosecution has filed formal charges, and the first to be accepted by ICT-2.

Apart from the former VC and RMP commissioner, university proctor Shariful Islam, RMP deputy commissioner Md Abu Maruf Hossain, additional deputy commissioner Md Shah Nur Alam Patwari, who was later promoted to superintendent of police, assistant commissioner Md Arifuzzaman (Kotwali zone), Tajhat

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FILE PHOTO

Protesters under the banner of Students Against Discrimination bring out a procession on the Dhaka University campus on July 1, 2024, demanding reinstatement of the 2018 government circular that abolished the quota system in civil service.

The July that rocked Bangladesh

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30 percent quota for children of freedom fighters in recruitment to first and second-class government jobs.

In response to that ruling, protests had already started on various campuses. On June 9, a section of students identifying as Dhaka University students issued an ultimatum to the government, asking it to reinstate the 2018 circular by June 30. Eid holidays contributed to the unusual length of the deadline.

With the expiry of the ultimatum, the July 1 protest marked a renewed phase of mobilisation.

The organisers announced a three-day programme, beginning on July 2 with a student rally starting from Dhaka University's Central Library. The following two days were to feature gatherings at the Raju Memorial Sculpture, bringing together students from Jagannath University, the seven DU-affiliated colleges, and institutions under

the National University.

They also declared a boycott of all classes and examinations at universities and colleges until July 4.

Interestingly, the earlier banner of "Dhaka University Students" was replaced with "Students Against Discrimination", signalling an attempt to broaden the scope of the movement.

However, as of July 1, students from private universities had not joined the demonstrations.

At the TSC event, student leaders placed four specific demands:

1. Reinstatement of the 2018 circular that abolished quotas in public service recruitment and introduce a merit-based system.
2. Establish a commission to review and eliminate unreasonable and discriminatory quotas in all grades of government jobs, with scope for considering only constitutionally

recognised backward communities.

3. Ensure that the quota facility cannot be used more than once in recruitment exams, and that unfilled quota posts are filled based on merit.

4. Take effective measures to ensure a corruption-free, impartial, and merit-based bureaucracy.

Though the first day saw a modest turnout, organisers remained confident that the momentum would build. In the days that followed, their expectations began to unfold on the streets.

The student agitation also unfolded against a backdrop of broader unrest in the public education sector. Thirty-five public universities across the country were already at a standstill due to strikes by teachers and staff who were protesting the newly introduced Prottoy Universal Pension Scheme. This existing disruption further amplified the sense of urgency and discontent on campuses.

Police struggle as key top posts lie vacant

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units without specific responsibilities, meaning their main duty is to attend office and do paperwork.

The force has been weakened further by a spate of forced retirement following the fall of the Awami League government through a mass uprising that left over 1,400 people dead – many of them in police shootings.

Many police officers have been accused of suppressing dissent through arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearance during the tenure of the past government.

In recent months, at least 40 officers with 25 years of service have been sent to forced retirement. Another 23 officers with the ranks of ASP and above have been arrested in cases related to the mass uprising. At least 57 officers – from additional DIG to ASP – have been absent from duty for over 60 days.

Asked, Enamul Haque Sagor, assistant inspector general at the PHQ, said promotions, postings, and filling of vacancies are part of a routine process.

Justice

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The case over the Holey Artisan Bakery attack was filed with Gulshan Police Station by Sub-Inspector Ripon Kumar Das under the Anti-Terrorism Act three days after the incident.

On November 27, 2019, the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal in Dhaka convicted and sentenced the seven accused to death for their involvement in the attack.

About four years later, the HC bench of Justice Shahidul Karim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman commuted their death sentence to imprisonment until death.

"Considering the brutality of the murder, the overall cruel behaviour of the terrorists on the spot at the time of the incident and the tarnishing of the image of Bangladesh in the outside world, we think that justice will be ensured if each of them (seven convicts) is sentenced to life imprisonment (till natural death) in the case," the bench said in the full text of the verdict uploaded on the SC website on June 17 this year.

Asked whether the attorney general's office will challenge the HC verdict on behalf of the state, Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman declined to comment.

On July 1, 2016, five militants with firearms, machetes, and grenades stormed the Holey Artisan Bakery in the diplomatic zone in Gulshan and held the diners hostage before killing three Bangladeshis, seven Japanese, nine Italians, and one Indian.

The militants were killed during a rescue operation by army commanders. Two police officers and a chief of the café were also killed during the 12-hour standoff. An injured employee of the restaurant died later.

The grisly attack followed a spate of targeted killings of bloggers, writers, and members of religious minorities over several years.

"We effectively maintained law and order during recent festivals, including the Eid and puja, without any reports of major crime... We are ready and capable of facing any situation."

He, however, acknowledged that the force faced some challenges following the mass uprising, but said it's now functioning to the best of its ability.

Police sources say a section of officers are frustrated at the delay in promotions and also the authorities' decision to attach officials to various units without giving them specific responsibilities.

Seeking anonymity, an official with the rank of SP said, "We perform our duties as per government instructions. If any police officer commits any crime, action should be taken against him. But it's frustrating that officials are being attached to different units without any specific duties."

A DIG-level officer said, "Officers junior to me have been promoted under political considerations. With only a few years left until retirement, I'll end my career as a DIG if I'm not promoted

soon."

Echoing the officer's sentiment, an additional SP said, "The stress surrounding promotions and postings often outweighs concerns about public security and law enforcement strategies."

During recent visits to six police stations in Dhaka city, The Daily Star correspondents talked to locals and found that police officers often avoid recording complaints unless a crime draws media or public attention.

On June 10, police recovered the body of 22-year-old Rakibul Hasan with multiple injury marks in the capital's Mirpur-11. His hands were cuffed and legs tied with a scarf.

His mother, Rozina Begum, said local criminals had previously attacked him at a hospital. But when she tried to file a case at Pallabi Police Station, police only recorded a complaint and took no action. "My son would have been alive if police had taken action immediately after that attack."

Contacted, Sub-Inspector Hossain

Act now or hospitals may get overrun: experts

FROM PAGE 1

Two new SARS-CoV-2 Omicron subvariants – XFG and XFC – were detected for the first time at Chattogram Medical College Hospital in April, shows a hospital-based influenza surveillance study conducted jointly by icddr,b and IEDCR.

Mustafizur Rahman, head of the virology laboratory at icddr,b, said the two are sub-variants of JN-1, which is already present in Bangladesh. Their transmission capacity is relatively high. This is why infections are spreading.

"But there is nothing to worry too much about it. The transmission rate was almost the same during the same period last year, but it didn't receive much attention due to other pressing issues at that time," he told The Daily Star.

He suggested vaccinating vulnerable people, including the elderly, pregnant women and those with medical conditions, to reduce the risk of fatality.

Bangladesh recorded the first Covid case on March 8, 2020, and the first death from the virus was reported 10 days later. Since then, the country has seen 20.52 lakh cases and 29,521 deaths, with 2021 being the deadliest year.

DENGUE

At least 10,296 dengue cases were reported since January, and around 58 percent of them were recorded last month, shows DGHS data.

Around 45 percent of the total cases were reported in Barishal division, as Borguna turned into a dengue hotspot with 2,746 hospital admissions since January.

Out of 42 deaths from dengue this year, 19 occurred in June. And the highest number of deaths – 21 – were reported in Dhaka city, followed by 11 in Barishal division.

The number of daily admissions at

hospitals shot up to 314 on June 30 from 124 on June 1.

Entomologist Prof Rakibul Bashar said the trend shows a geometric rise in cases that were three times higher than those reported in May.

"If this trend continues, cases could increase four to five times this month and even tenfold by August compared to May," he said.

CHIKUNGUNYA

Another mosquito-borne disease, chikungunya, has made a comeback in Dhaka after eight years.

From January 1 to May 28, at least 337 suspected chikungunya cases were reported, and 153 of those were confirmed by RT-PCR tests, according to the IEDCR.

The viral disease causes fever; severe joint pain and headache; muscle pain; and rash.

In the first three weeks of June, chikungunya was detected in 140 out of 171 patients who went through RT-PCR testing at icddr,b diagnostic laboratories.

Chikungunya cases were confirmed for the first time in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj in 2008. Three years later, some cases were reported in Dhaka's Dohar upazila. In 2017, Dhaka and 16 other districts saw a major outbreak of the viral disease, according to the IEDCR.

WHAT EXPERTS AND AUTHORITIES SAY

Covid and chikungunya cases remain concentrated in Dhaka, while Dengue is now more prevalent in Barishal division than in Dhaka, said Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury, an associate professor at the internal medicine department of Bangladesh Medical University.

"These diseases haven't yet overwhelmed inpatient units at hospitals. But they are definitely putting pressure on outpatient departments, as patients of these viral diseases are primarily treated there."

Mubarak, who recorded her complaint, said he could not recall any details about it.

Earlier on May 31, two suspected criminals were beaten to death in Darus Salam. Locals alleged that the duo were involved in mugging.

"We called police, but no one came. So, locals took the law into their own hands," said a resident of the area.

However, Rakibul Islam, OC of Darus Salam Police Station, claimed they respond to all calls and regularly conduct drives.

Police have not been able to make any headway in scores of murder cases filed over the last 10 months.

One such example is the case filed over the killing of BNP leader Kamrul Ahsan Shadhon. He was shot dead in the capital's Badda area on May 26, but no arrests have been made.

Earlier, the body of a five-year-old girl was found in a sack on May 14, a day after she had gone missing. Her mother filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station, but police are yet to make any arrests.

He further said that if both dengue and Covid cases continue to rise, hospitals in Dhaka could come under strain. "There should be adequate preparations, along with preventive measures."

Rabbi, also a member of aWHO expert panel on dengue, recommended that hospitals set up dedicated units to prevent the spread of viral infections among patients already admitted there.

District and upazila hospitals should provide doctors with training based on the latest guideline on dengue treatment, enabling them to deal with patients at local hospitals, instead of referring them to healthcare facilities in Dhaka.

He also stressed the need for ensuring an adequate supply of antiviral medicines at hospitals.

Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, said local government bodies are primarily responsible for vector control, but many of them remained non-functional over the past year.

Water stagnation contributed to the rise in dengue cases in many areas of several coastal districts. "Delayed admission is the main reason behind fatalities. Otherwise, our preparations are quite adequate," he told this newspaper.

"The next two months are very crucial for us. It is our responsibility to ensure treatment, and we are preparing a plan accordingly," he said, adding that the government has been supplying necessary test kits, oxygen cylinders, and medicines to hospitals.

While chikungunya is not usually fatal, the other two viral diseases could turn deadly, he noted. "We will come under pressure. Unfortunately, outbreaks of these diseases occurred simultaneously. But preparations are well underway."

Month of remembering,
mourning begins today

Govt, parties take elaborate programmes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government, as well as major political parties – including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the newly formed National Citizen Party founded by the July protestors – have announced separate month-long programmes to commemorate the first anniversary of the July uprising.

Students began their protest against the quota system in government jobs on July 1 of last year. The movement quickly gained momentum, fuelled by the government's harsh and brutal response.

What started as a demand for reform soon transformed into an all-out anti-government movement, calling for the resignation of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina. The mass uprising culminated in her ouster on August 5.

Around 1,400 people were killed during the uprising, according to a report of a United Nations fact-finding mission.

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Earlier, on Wednesday, Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, during a briefing at the Chief Adviser's Office, said the government will construct monuments in all district headquarters to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives during the mass uprising, with their names inscribed on the monument of the respective district.

Later, the chief adviser's press wing also announced a 36-day commemorative programme titled "July Remembrance Celebration", which will begin today and continue till August 5.

As part of the programmes, prayers will be held for the martyrs at mosques, temples, pagodas, churches, and other places of worship today.

Also, a mass signature campaign will be launched on the same day, demanding justice for the martyrs and trials for those responsible for the killings.

A scholarship in memory of the July martyrs will also be introduced at the National University today.

Further events are scheduled for July 5, July 7, and July

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Yunus, Rubio

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Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke today with the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's Interim Government Dr Muhammad Yunus. The secretary and chief adviser affirmed their shared commitment to deepening economic ties between the United States and Bangladesh and to enhancing security and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

The CA's press wing said both leaders discussed issues of mutual interest, including bilateral trade, Bangladesh's ongoing process of transition to democracy, and aid for Rohingya refugees.

Rubio expressed his support for Bangladesh's reform agenda and its move to hold elections early next year.

Noting that the US is Bangladesh's largest export destination and the top source of remittances, both leaders expressed hope for concluding talks on tariffs soon, paving the way for increased bilateral trade, added the press wing statement.

Referring to an "excellent" meeting held between National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman and US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau in Washington on Thursday, Yunus emphasised strengthening bilateral ties.

He also thanked President Donald Trump for responding positively to his request to suspend reciprocal tariff measures on Bangladesh for 90

days, adding, "We are working with your officials to finalise a package of measures to effectively respond to President Trump's trade agenda."

Seeking US support for the country's democratic transition, the chief adviser reaffirmed that elections would be held "in the early part of next year" and hoped that ongoing dialogue between his government and political parties would result in the much-needed reforms of the country's political system.

"The Election Commission is working hard to reorganise the electoral system, which was destroyed by the previous government," the press wing quoted Yunus as saying.

He commended Washington for its generous support to Rohingya refugees. The US has been the top donor to the Rohingyas since 2017.

"The prospect for a viable solution to the Rohingya crisis and repatriation of them back to Myanmar is now better than ever before, and Bangladesh is working on that," Yunus said.

The two leaders also touched upon geopolitical issues, including the need for a stable and peaceful Indo-Pacific region and Bangladesh's relationships with its neighbours.

Yunus invited Rubio to visit Bangladesh ahead of the general election to witness the country's transition to democracy first-hand, stating, "It will inspire our young people."

Nahid wants

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government," he said on Facebook yesterday.

The NCP had earlier said it decided to announce the July Declaration on August 3. "Since the government has failed, we will not rely on anyone. It's now our responsibility to present the proclamation on behalf of the students and the people," Nahid said at a press conference on Sunday.

Yesterday, he wrote that it is possible to publish both the declaration and the charter by July.

"We want the state to release the declaration with a commitment to incorporate it into the constitution in the future."

"But if the government does not take any initiative, we will not sit idly. We will surely publish our own," he said, encouraging other groups to do the same.

"The government will have to accept it if we can make a document together," he said.

"The July Declaration will be read out by the families of those martyred during the uprising," the NCP leader added.

Nahid said the July Declaration should serve as a national document, outlining the historical context of the uprising, recognising the contributions of those who were killed, injured, or led the movement, and the political demands that emerged from it.

It is intended to gain legal and constitutional validity, he said.

The NCP leader said the government had initially proposed to release the declaration in consultation with all political parties, leading student groups to postpone their planned unilateral release on December 31 last year.

Drafts were submitted by several organisations, including the Student Against Discrimination, with the expectation that the government would compile a unified version.

However, Nahid said, the government missed multiple deadlines and failed to clarify the delays.

He added that the July Charter would lay out the outline for structural reforms to the state and specify which parts of the constitution need to be amended.

This would be a consensus document signed by all parties, and while the method of implementation, whether by referendum, constituent assembly, or parliamentary amendment, remains undecided, any future government would be bound to implement it, he said.

"If any party disrupts the consensus process for partisan gain, the government must not hesitate to fulfil this historic responsibility by working with all other parties and the general public."

"Without presenting the July Charter and Declaration, the government will not have the authority to take any initiative in celebrating July," he added.