

Denied VIP access, Jubo Dal leader lead bar rampage

Assault women, loot cash; BNP youth org expels him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jubo Dal leader and his men vandalised a restaurant and bar, assaulted women and staffers, and looted cash and liquor after the leader was denied access to a VIP room there in the capital's Mohakhali area.

The key accused is Monir Hossain, 42, convener of Jubo Dal's Banani Thana unit, said police.

The vandalism took place around 8:40pm on Tuesday at Zakaria International Restaurant and Bar on AK Khandaker Road, said Emdadul Haque, a sub-inspector of Banani Police Station.

Abu Bakkar Siddique, assistant general manager of the establishment, filed a case with Banani Police Station on Wednesday, accusing Monir, five named, and 20-25 unidentified accused.

Meanwhile, Jubo Dal yesterday expelled Monir from the organisation for violating party discipline and engaging in activities contrary to its ideology and principles.

In a statement, the youth wing of the BNP said it will not take responsibility for any misconduct by expelled members and urged all leaders and activists to sever all organisational ties with them.

The statement also called upon law enforcement agencies to take appropriate legal actions against him.

According to the case statement, on June 30, Monir visited the restaurant and asked for a VIP room. As all rooms were occupied, the bar staff offered him a regular table. After dining and receiving a discounted bill, he allegedly left angrily, threatening retaliation. The following night, 20 to 25 others, stormed the restaurant and began vandalising the establishment on Monir's orders, it said.

The group allegedly smashed televisions, tables, chairs, crockery, CCTV monitors and cameras, laptops, and glassware, Abu Bakar said in the statement.

When staffers tried to intervene, some of them were assaulted. Before leaving, the attackers threatened to shut down the business if they informed the police, the case statement added. CCTV footage circulated on social media showed members of the group molesting and assaulting two women as they desperately tried to flee the restaurant.

Contacted, Banani SI Emdadul said they have also heard about the molestation and were looking into the matter. "We are investigating the matter. Police are trying to identify and arrest those involved," the SI added.

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR



With "Quota or Merit? Merit, Merit" painted across his back, a protester waves the national flag as hundreds of university students gather at Dhaka's Shahbagh intersection on July 4, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Protesters call for nationwide strike

FROM PAGE 1

The Supreme Court's Appellate Division declining to stay the High Court's verdict that reinstated the quota system. Instead, it advised the government to submit a formal leave-to-appeal petition after the full text of the High Court judgement is released. As the news spread swiftly across social media and campus networks, students took to the streets.

The protest began around 11:00am with students gathering in front of the Dhaka University's central library before marching to Shahbagh. Thousands of demonstrators, under the banner "Boishommobirodhi Chhatra Andolon" (Students Against Discrimination), brought traffic to a halt from noon to evening.

Defying the rain, they sat on the streets, waving banners and shouting slogans such as "Quota na medha, medha medha," (Quota or merit, merit, merit), "Ekattorer Banglay boishommor thai nai" (There is no place for discrimination in 71's Bangla), and "Quotar kobar dao" (Bury the quota), as they renewed their call for an end to what they termed an unjust system.

The protesters also announced fresh programmes: mass processions on July 6 from all universities and colleges and a countrywide student strike on July 7, boycotting classes and exams.

Nahid Islam, a key coordinator of the movement, addressed the gathering

before lifting the blockade at 6:10pm. "The executive branch still holds the authority to reissue the 2018 circular. We call on the government to act decisively, and we hope the court will also consider the voices of the youth This is not about opposing the freedom fighters; it is about upholding the spirit of the Liberation War; ensuring equal opportunity for all."

The presence of law enforcers was heavy across the city but they refrained from direct intervention. However, tensions flared briefly around 5:00pm when helmet-donning police officials appeared poised for action. Protesters formed a human shield but the situation de-escalated peacefully.

Beyond Shahbagh, the anti-quota wave intensified nationwide.

Students from Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University blocked the Agargaon road, while Jagannath University students staged sit-ins near Ray Saheb Bazar. Jahangirnagar University protesters took to the Dhaka-Aricha Highway, causing temporary traffic standstills.

Cumilla University students blocked the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway for three hours. The mobilisation spread further as Rajshahi University students braved heavy rain to occupy the Dhaka-Rajshahi Highway.

Similar blockades were reported from Chittagong University, where the

Chattogram-Khagrachhari Highway was blocked, and from Barishal University, where students blocked the Barishal-Kuakata Highway for five hours.

Protesters reiterated their demands: uphold the 2018 circular abolishing quotas, form a commission to review the quota system ensuring only constitutionally mandated reservations remain, stop multiple uses of quota privileges, fill vacant quota posts with merit-based candidates, and ensure a corruption-free, meritocratic civil service.

The political undercurrents were also visible on campus. Pro-government Chhatra League activists were seen positioned in various dormitories to discourage participation in the quota-reform protests.

At Dhaka University's Amar Ekushey Hall, protester Sarjis Alam was reportedly forced to vacate his dorm, prompting an overnight gathering of fellow students demanding justice.

Meanwhile, the strike by public university teachers and staffers against the government's new pension scheme continued, adding another layer of unrest to an already charged atmosphere.

As night fell over Shahbagh, the energy of the day's protests lingered. Students dispersed with renewed determination; eyes set on the upcoming mass demonstrations and the promised student strike.

Panic grips NBR officials

FROM PAGE 1

mediate. They secured an agreement for the officials to return to work based on what they understood to be government assurances that there would be no reprisals.

But the government's swift steps have created a palpable sense of fear mixed with self-recrimination among protest leaders, with some officials privately conceding their strategy was a "failure of leadership". One senior official admitted they "rushed into the shutdown", which he said was a "tactical error that left them exposed".

"Everyone's now asking: what went wrong? Why did we go for a shutdown so quickly this time?" said the official who held a leadership role in the protest.

"Last time, the movement unfolded gradually. We kept the government informed every step of the way. But this time, it was different."

The official said a sense of "suffocation" now prevails as they struggle to understand why the government took "such an aggressive stance" instead of pursuing other disciplinary options. "No one knows who might be targeted next. The entire atmosphere has become deeply unsettling."

This internal crisis has practical consequences. The removal of seasoned officials has created what insiders describe as a "clear skills and leadership vacuum", raising concerns about the NBR's operational capacity at a critical time.

The episode highlights a tension in a vital area of Bangladesh's economy. The government is attempting to push through reforms to modernise revenue collection, but has met with fierce resistance from an influential bureaucratic cadre. Having faced down the protest, the government seems determined to reassert its authority. Yet, the heavy-handed approach came under criticism.

BUSINESS LEADERS EMBARRASSED

Prominent business leaders who mediated an end to the crippling strike at the national tax authority on June 29 have expressed "embarrassment" after the government's action against protesters.

Syed Nasim Manzur, president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh, emphasised the longstanding demand of the business community for a clear separation between tax policy formulation and tax

administration.

"This reform is essential," he said, noting that assurances of support for reform were received from the protesting officials. "It was on this basis that we engaged with them, with the aim of mediating a resolution to the ongoing crisis."

Referring to the work stoppage, he added, "When the shutdown occurred, we felt a moral responsibility to intervene, not only to support dialogue but also to safeguard the economy from further disruption."

He expressed appreciation for the successful outcome of their mediation efforts. "We were fortunate to be able to convince both the striking NBR officials and the finance adviser, along with the NBR chairman, that negotiation was the best path forward," he said.

Following the intervention and based on assurances from the finance adviser and the chairman that the government would adopt a sympathetic stance towards the officials involved, the work stoppage was brought to an end.

Manzur underscored the importance of integrity and competence in the reform process. "Such reform requires the involvement of capable and honest officials within the NBR. Indiscriminate targeting of NBR personnel will only hinder progress now. Therefore, we urge all stakeholders to avoid actions that could give rise to a new crisis."

He welcomed the government's initiative to form a committee to address these issues.

"We sincerely thank the government for establishing the committee. However, we respectfully urge that its primary objective be to facilitate a participatory and constructive dialogue, particularly with the honest and competent officials of the NBR in order to achieve and sustain meaningful reform."

The newly formed five-member advisory committee, led by Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, yesterday met with NBR officials, including representatives from the associations of BCS taxation and customs-VAT cadres. The NBR officials urged the government to adopt a more flexible stance on the protesters and halt the ongoing actions, according to senior NBR sources.

The committee asked NBR members and the associations to submit elaborate reform proposals concerning the ordinance within two weeks.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman

and CEO of PRAN-RFL Group, said they became involved when they faced difficulties in exporting goods. "Some 28 of our export trucks were stranded at Akhaura Land Port because of the shutdown," he said.

"We thought that they did not want the split of the NBR. But we came to know that things were not like that. We found that there was a gap between them and their bosses."

"We are used to resolving labour issues in our factories through discussion, and we thought a resolution was possible through discussion."

Chowdhury said that during a meeting with the finance adviser, they conveyed that the protesting officials were willing to return to work on the condition that they would not face harassment or disciplinary measures.

"If our shipment suffers, or we miss or delay a shipment, who will take the responsibility? So we urge the authorities to pardon them. Please create an environment for them to work, enable them to work, and let the country and economy operate smoothly," he said.

Kamran T Rahman, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said business leaders had urged tax officials from the outset to reconsider their course of action. "We told them clearly that this is not the right way. You can't hold the country hostage like this."

But he also expressed disappointment at the government's tough stance following what he described as a clear understanding between mediators and the finance adviser.

After the pen-down strike was called off, Rahman said, the government should have reciprocated by reopening talks. "I believe this hardline approach could have been avoided. It would have been far better to work toward a sustainable, year-long solution," he added. "There must be renewed dialogue with the government. We have to focus on protecting the country, preserving the economy, and keeping everything running."

Tasken Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, described the situation as an "embarrassment" for the business community.

"We fully supported the government's reform agenda, which aligns with long-standing demands for honest, modern, and practical changes," he said. "Also, we strongly oppose the way NBR officials enforced a pen-down strike, effectively

paralysing the entire economy. The government has lost more than Tk 5,000 crore."

Ahmed described the work stoppage as "unprofessional", and said business leaders stepped in only after customs operations across the country remained suspended for two straight days.

"We urged the authorities not to escalate the situation further and to handle it with sympathy, acknowledging that mistakes can happen on both sides," said Ahmed.

"We believe a softer approach would have been more effective than immediate punitive action. Hardline measures help no one -- these issues should be resolved through dialogue. Frankly, we're quite embarrassed by how things unfolded," he said. "We will try to re-establish communication with the government, because we don't understand what changed."

Tapan Chowdhury, managing director of the country's largest drugmaker Square Pharmaceuticals, described the measures taken by the authorities after the withdrawal of the shutdown as "unfortunate".

He said the protesting officials withdrew the strike after listening to the business leaders, but they were very scared about possible punitive steps.

"We told them we would take care of the matter and asked them not to worry. We said nothing would happen if they behaved properly," he said.

"It's [what has happened later] a shame for us. We have lost our face. I don't think that anyone will listen to us in future," Chowdhury said. "It's not that we are supporting them [protesters]. We are saying this for the greater national interest."

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the NBR chairman talked about forgetting the past and moving forward after the withdrawal of the shutdown.

Taking punitive measures after making such a commitment is actually destroying trust and putting the business community in an embarrassing situation, he said.

The NBR will lose dynamism as a technical organisation if the officials' morale is broken, Ehsan said.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, also said work speed will be slow at the NBR if the panicky situation prevails and the officials' morale is down. "This is concerning for us," he said.

Insubordination

FROM PAGE 1

confidential report.

The proposed ordinance also brings changes to the provisions regarding the punishment of guilty officials.

Under the existing ordinance, section 37(2)(b) provides the penalty of "dismissal from service". In contrast, the proposed ordinance replaces this with "compulsory retirement from service".

In cases of compulsory retirement, the employee concerned will be entitled to all retirement-related benefits as per the rules. However, in the case of dismissal from service, the employee is not entitled to any such benefits.

In cases where allegations are brought against a female government employee, the proposed ordinance makes it mandatory to include at least one female official in the probe committee.

Furthermore, no officer of a lower rank than the accused will be allowed to serve on the committee.

Additionally, punitive measures may be taken against them in accordance with government service rules.

"Our demands were more, but even so, we welcome the government's initiative as a 'lesser evil' step," Nazrul Islam, co-general secretary of the Bangladesh Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum, told The Daily Star.

Mob beats 3 of a family dead

FROM PAGE 1

yesterday, Russell's wife Mim Akhter claimed the attack followed a long-standing feud with neighbours Bashir, Sharif, and others.

"On Tuesday, they beat up one of our relatives over an alleged mobile phone theft ... Since then, there have been tensions between the families. Bashir even called my husband several times on Wednesday night and threatened to kill him."

When this correspondent visited the area, more than two dozen locals said a social arbitration took place around 7:00am yesterday to resolve the dispute. Local Union Parishad Chairman Shimul Billal and member Bachchu Miah were present, while Bashir and Sharif gathered people at the scene.

At one stage, Rubi became agitated and misbehaved with Shimul and others, which triggered a clash that escalated into the mob attack.

Shimul Billal, Bachchu, and Bashir could not be reached for comments.

Political parties agree

FROM PAGE 1

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "We have seen repeated misuse of presidential clemency. We therefore agreed in principle that this power should be regulated by law."

He added, "We also discussed the formation of a legal advisory board and guidelines to govern the process. We want judicial services to reach people's doorsteps. That's why we support permanent High Court benches at the divisional level, subject to consultation with the Supreme Court."

Salahuddin also stressed that any constitutional amendment must be lasting and above party interests. "We cannot make changes that may not last. Our proposals are not partisan, but made in the best interests of the people and the state. There should be no political bias in this process."

The National Citizen Party (NCP) endorsed both proposals. NCP Member Secretary Akhtar Hossain said, "Presidential clemency should not be absolute. It should be based on recommendations from a board."

He said the misuse of pardons for political gains in the past undermined justice. "Even top criminals were pardoned for political reasons. This eroded public trust," Akhtar said, calling for legal clarity on crimes ineligible for clemency.

Speaking about decentralisation of the judiciary, the NCP leader said permanent benches at the divisional level are essential due to the backlog of cases. Hundreds of thousands of cases are pending with the High Court, with only around 100 judges to handle those.

He recalled resistance during the eighth amendment to the constitution when attempts to decentralise the judiciary were criticised as threats to the unitary structure.

"This time, the law must avoid constitutional obstacles and reflect people's aspirations," he said.

Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, nayeb-e-ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami, said, "We proposed that clemency must not be granted without the consent of the victim's family. In the past, convicted criminals were pardoned unilaterally..."

He added, "The proposed law would form a recommendation committee to advise the president. In cases like murder, clemency can only be granted with the victim's family's agreement."

On decentralisation, Taher said, "Establishing permanent High Court benches is a demand of the time. It will bring justice closer to the people."

He acknowledged concerns over the lack of experienced judges and lawyers outside Dhaka, but said this could be addressed with training, recruitment, and proper budget allocation.

"Just as doctors are posted in rural areas, similar efforts can attract lawyers to regional courts," he said. "Circuit benches are not a permanent solution. Establishing permanent ones is now a necessity."

Briefing reporters, Prof Riaz said further progress is expected in the coming week.

"Besides, there was supposed to be a discussion on the state of emergency. But this issue was tied to the National Constitutional Council. Now that the NCC is no longer on the table, we will present the state of emergency issue to the political parties again in a new way," he said.

Noting the progress made, Riaz said further advancements on outstanding issues are likely by next week.