

Nationwide mayhem leaves 6 dead

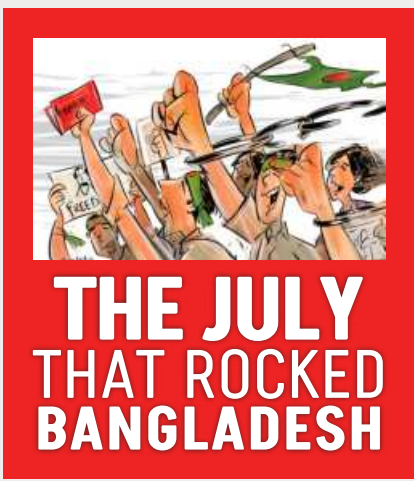
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July 16, 2024, marked a grim escalation in the quota reform protests as violence swept across Bangladesh, leaving at least six people dead, including three students, and hundreds injured in fierce clashes involving protesters, Chhatra League activists, and police.

In Chattogram, three people were killed during confrontations between quota reform protesters and Chhatra League activists. Among the dead were Wasim Akram, a student of Chittagong College; Faisal Ahmed, a management student at Omargani MES College; and Md Faruk, an employee at a furniture shop. Hospital sources confirmed that Faruk had sustained bullet wounds while Akram was stabbed. Thirty others were injured, two critically. The violence erupted after Chhatra League men occupied the rally venue at Sholashahar Railway Station, sparking chaos at multiple nearby locations including Muradpur and Gate No 2.

In Dhaka, pitched battles raged for over seven hours in Science Lab and Dhaka College areas. Two people died in the clashes—Md Shajahan, a 24-year-old hawk with a makeshift shop near Balaka Cinema Hall, and Sabuj Ali, 25, who suffered critical head injuries. Both were declared dead at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Shajahan's mother, Ayesha Begum, broke down at the hospital, crying, "My son had nothing to do with the protest. Who killed him?"

The Science Lab intersection turned into a war zone as protesters—mostly college students—engaged in running battles with stick-wielding Chhatra League activists. Brick chunks flew as both groups chased each other back



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and forth between 1:45pm and 8:45pm. At least 127 people were injured, including two police officers. Around 7:00pm, they chased away former Awami League MP Haji Salim near LabAid Hospital, forcing him and his aides to take refuge inside the building.

Clashes also erupted in Chankharpul, Rayshahebbazar, Mirpur-10, Bhatara, and Farmgate. At Rayshahebbazar, five students—including four from Jagannath University and one from Kabi Nazrul Government College—were shot during an attack carried out by Awami League and Jubo League men.

In Rangpur, tragedy struck when police opened fire on students protesting at Begum Rokeya University. Abu Sayed, 25, an English department student, was shot in the chest. A widely circulated video showed him standing with his arms outstretched before collapsing. He was declared dead at



Rangpur Medical College Hospital. Around 30 other students were injured in the incident. A haunting image of Sayed with his arms raised—moments before he was shot—quickly became an icon of the movement, symbolising student defiance in the face of state violence.

Tension flared further when students tried to bring Sayed's body back to campus. Police intercepted them and sent the body for autopsy. In response, enraged students set fire to the vice-chancellor's residence and vandalised five university vehicles. Vice Chancellor Prof Abdur Rashid, along with staff and faculty members, was confined inside the building for hours before being rescued by law enforcers. Students also set fire to a Chhatra League leader's room at Bangabandhu Hall.

The violent turn of events followed a massive swell in protester numbers

after the previous day's attack on Dhaka University students. Students from private universities and colleges joined in droves. Major thoroughfares including Jatrabari, Shantinagar, Science Lab, Motijheel, Badda, Tantibazar, Uttara, and Beribandh were blocked, bringing traffic to a standstill. Protesters also halted trains at Mohakhali for over six hours and obstructed highways connecting Dhaka to Chattogram, Sylhet, Tangail, and Mymensingh.

The government responded by deploying Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Dhaka, Chattogram, Bogura, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Gazipur. It closed all secondary schools and colleges indefinitely and postponed the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams scheduled for July 18. Late at night, the University Grants Commission announced that all public and private universities and their affiliated colleges would be closed until further notice, instructing students to vacate their dormitories.

Hasnat Abdullah, one of the protest coordinators, condemned the day's events as "state-sponsored attacks." Another coordinator, Asif Mahmud, announced plans for a symbolic "coffin procession" and gayebana janaza at Raju Bhashkarjo the following day at 2:00pm to honour those killed. He urged students from across the country to join in remembrance and resistance.

As the day came to a close, the scale of destruction, trauma, and fury left no doubt that July 16 would be remembered as one of the darkest days of the quota reform movement—cementing a turning point in the nationwide uprising.

Let's build new Bangladesh with spirit of July: CA

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has urged the people of the country to work together to build a new Bangladesh, utilising the opportunity created by the sacrifice of the July martyrs.



He made the call in a message issued yesterday on the occasion of "July Martyrs' Day" to be observed across the country today.

"On this day, I remember with deep respect all the martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the July uprising to make the nation free from the chains of tyranny."

The chief adviser said it's a remarkable day in the history of the mass uprising of students, workers, and commoners.

On this day, he said, at least six people were martyred in Chattogram, Rangpur, and Dhaka in police firing and attacks on the students, who were protesting for the abolition of the discriminatory quota system in government jobs.

"The sacrifice of these fearless heroes gave a strong impetus to the movement."

To uphold the contribution of the martyred and injured July fighters, the interim government, after assuming office, has taken various initiatives for their welfare and their families, the chief adviser said.

The July Mass Uprising Directorate and the "July Shaheed Smriti Foundation" were established, he said, to preserve the memory of the martyrs and for the welfare of the martyrs' families and the injured.

He mentioned that the process of preparing a complete list of July martyrs and publishing it in the gazette is ongoing.

Yunus said Tk 30 lakh and monthly allowances are being given to the families of each July martyr, while similar initiatives are also being implemented for the welfare of the injured July fighters.

The chief adviser said the July martyrs dreamed of a new state system free from discrimination, corruption, and autocracy. "Everyone must work together to utilise this opportunity created in exchange for their sacrifice."

Pvt sector sidelined in tariff talks

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unable to access the full details of the discussions.

"As it is a government-to-government matter and protected under an NDA, we respect the confidentiality. We do not want to compromise the trust or breach the agreement. If the main negotiators can protect our interests, we are satisfied," Khan said.

The BGMEA chief reiterated the association's demand for a tariff structure that is both affordable and aligned with regional competitors such as India, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Cambodia. "If the tariff is slightly higher but allows for a level playing field, that would still be acceptable," he said.

However, Khan stressed that the association is pushing for a rate at least 10 percentage points lower than our competitors to ensure Bangladesh remains competitive in the US market.

Khan also flagged a looming crisis surrounding new US requirements for 40 percent local value addition. While BGMEA wants a lower threshold, confusion persists over how "value addition" is defined. "If only raw materials are included in the calculation, factories would struggle to comply," he said.

"Many factories that depend entirely on the US market will simply not survive," he added. "That could trigger widespread factory closures and mass layoffs."

He further cautioned that factories exporting more than 40 percent of their products to the US would be the hardest hit. "Some factories are even 100 percent dependent on the US market. If they fail to comply with the new tariff structure, they will not survive."

Former BGMEA president Rubana Huq, speaking virtually, described the current standoff as "personal and bilateral" for President Donald Trump, and criticised the government for failing to meaningfully engage stakeholders at an early stage.

She emphasised that no strategic alignment is possible without first addressing the deep-rooted trust deficit between the government and the business community.

Huq suggested Bangladesh should learn from countries like Pakistan, which actively involved its private sector in high-stakes trade talks with the US.

"We need a two-tier structure — both a steering and a working committee — to ensure inclusivity. BGMEA must be part of the process," she said.

Expanding on the broader implications, Huq argued that the US's defiance of global trade norms, particularly rules of origin and special differential treatment, has created a precarious situation for countries like Bangladesh. Even so, she pointed to signals from Washington that suggest room for dialogue.

"The White House is signalling: 'Meet us halfway.' That's a hint of flexibility," she said.

Huq stressed that Bangladesh must recognise its limitations when compared to Vietnam, India, or Pakistan in terms of geopolitical alignment and negotiating leverage. As an example, she cited China's rare earth minerals deal with the US, which she said underscores how strategic trade relations have become.

"Even China is headed toward a truce with the US. Meanwhile, we are exposed," she said.

She also warned against complacency over projections that estimate the impact at \$8 billion in lost trade. According to her, the risks are far greater. "It's far worse. We are seeing customers frontload orders out of fear. In just five months, exports to the US totalled \$3.38 billion."

Huq outlined a bleak scenario if the situation continues unresolved: sharp declines in export volume, massive layoffs, intensified pricing pressure, reduced foreign direct investment, and serious disruptions to supply chains. She said the country's GDP could contract as a result.

"Let's be clear — America is our



Participants of the roundtable discussion on "What's next for Bangladesh after US tariff talks?" held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

single biggest growing market. And just when we were opening up and attracting even Chinese investors, this shock hits us."

She insisted that consulting the private sector is no longer optional, but essential to avoid deep economic fallout.

"This is not just about big businesses. Millions of jobs are at stake. And as some exporters shift from the US to the EU, it's affecting even those outside direct US trade."

Kihak Sung, chairman of Youngone Corporation, said the tariff shock marks a reversal of decades of free trade gains. "In general, we have enjoyed the benefits of a globalised world and free trade. But now, I think we are going backwards," he said.

He pointed to a core supply chain vulnerability: "Many companies in Bangladesh still rely heavily on raw materials and components imported from China."

He appealed for transitional relief. "If they could negotiate an implementation period of at least six months, it would help companies to do alternative sourcing," he said.

Economist Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of RAPID, warned that the private sector must brace for a worst-case scenario.

"So far, we haven't seen meaningful

discussion between the government, researchers, and stakeholders," he said. "If non-trade issues are on the table, we need to know what those are, at least in principle."

He added that a bad deal may be worse than no deal, but panic should also be avoided if the talks stretch beyond August. "Negotiations must continue beyond artificial deadlines."

Razzaque also called for political consensus on what kind of trade deal would be best for Bangladesh in the medium to long term.

THE BIGGEST INSULT
Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions, delivered a blunt critique of the government's decision to exclude the private sector from the negotiation process.

He called it "the biggest insult" and said the excuse of the NDA was being used to cover up a lack of planning. "They could've consulted us on red lines and fallback options," he said.

"That should not have been the case," he said. "I'm not claiming that everything would have turned out differently if we had been involved,

international law, including norms followed by multilateral organisations of which the United States is a member."

Chowdhury called for a comparative study of Vietnam's strategy, where an initial 46 percent tariff was slashed by 26 percentage points in just three months.

"We have to understand the methodology that Vietnam uses and its negotiating strategy. Vietnam moved swiftly at the very first warning signs, started high-level contacts and immediately entered into negotiations for a framework trade deal," he said.

A framework agreement provides a forum for continuing discussions across a varied spectrum of trade, investment and intellectual property. Chowdhury added that American concerns span para-tariffs, non-tariff barriers, procurement, corruption, copyright, foreign equity caps and repatriation.

Lutfie M Ayub, chairman of Fountain Garments Manufacturing Ltd, said half his output goes to the US and half to the EU. Now, buyers like Walmart are in a "wait-and-see" mode.

"This waiting period could cost us several idle months — a difficult situation for our factories," he said.

"When we approached the government for clarity, we were warned by other agencies that delays and a lack of proactive action would cost us. And that seems to be what's happening."

"The government responded by saying they're bound by a non-disclosure agreement. That's quite frustrating. They didn't need to share the full agreement, but they could have consulted us on key points. We understand how to run our businesses best."

"If we lose \$8 billion in business, that could mean one million jobs lost — with devastating social consequences," Ayub said. "We need a decisive deal before August 1."

M Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, called for a new market-based approach. "We need a market-based strategy where exporters and US buyers — brands and retailers — share the added cost."

"BGMEA must play a guardian or curating role. If left to individual firms, it'll lead to undercutting — a race to the bottom."

He said the most sustainable strategy is to enhance competitiveness: "We need to bring down trade and business costs through better logistics and ease of doing business, and improve productivity through tech and skills."

"We're at a disadvantage compared to Vietnam, India, Indonesia — this has to change," he said.

"Competitiveness improvement is a medium to long-term agenda, but it must start now. It should have started 10 years ago."

"If we are offering politics, security, and defence, then we must ask for the best possible tariff outcome in return."

Crime 'stable' at 11 murders

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about murder, rape and child abuse as if it were exchange rates of currencies. They further suggest that the people should be relieved since crime trends are holding steady, and that too because law enforcers are at work.

In other words, rapists can continue raping, murderers can go around killing people just as they did last month because the police are in control. It is because the law enforcement agencies are working hard that crime is stable, the statement claims.

Turning to the numbers, provided by the press wing (which they said was sourced from the police), murder, rape, and violence and against women and children have risen since January 2025. There was a drop in the number of rapes in February while violence against women and children showed a drop in June.

Murders rose by 17 percent from 294 in January 2025 to 344 in June. Rapes rose by 25 percent from 392 in January to 492 in June, with February registering a decline with 337 rapes. Violence against women and children rose from 1,048 in January to 1,441 instances in June, peaking in May with 1,584 cases.

Comparing the data of the first six months this year to another year might give a better idea of the crime trend. There were 1,933 murders in the first six months of 2025. In other words, almost 11 (10.74) people were murdered every day compared to 8.28 every day in 2023. There were 2,744 rapes till June 2025. That is, just over 15 women were raped every day so far this year compared to just over 14 a day in 2023. Perhaps the most damning indictment for the government is its failure to protect children. There were 2,159 instances of violence against children between January and June this year amounting to 12 children abused every day as opposed to 2,713 such instances in 2023, which is about 7.43 per day.

Since the latter half of 2024 was unstable and featured the July uprising, it would not be a fair comparison to understand the general trends, hence the comparison with the preceding year.

Police data show that violent crimes

in the first half of 2025 outpaced the corresponding period of 2024 in almost every major category. Murders climbed by 25.93 percent, with 1,930 cases recorded this year, compared to 1,533 last year. However, police noted that over 400 of this year's cases involved incidents that occurred in previous years.

Repression against women and children rose by 22.29 percent, reaching 11,008 cases in the first half of 2025 — just short of the 2021 peak of 11,240. In the same period last year, 9,002 cases were reported.

Earlier this month, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad noted that the number of rape cases between January and June this year is nearly as high as the total number of rape cases last year in their compilation of statistics based on 15 newspapers. The organisation reported 481 rapes — 345 of them children. The number was 516 in entire 2024.

But far more than numbers, or mainstream media reports, public perception is shaped by social media and the barbarity of certain criminal acts. The grisly murder at Mitford and the mugging in Shyamoli where muggers stripped their victim of even his shirt have had a strong impact in the public mind about their own safety during early morning walks.

It does not reflect sensitivity on the part of the press wing if in reply to these genuine concerns they say, the trends are holding steady and numbers are not rising and whatever crime that is happening out there do not bear the "hallmarks of a crime wave". Crime statistics illustrate the state of security of the citizens, and as such, it is only natural to focus on the recent trend, the here and now.

This "stable crime trend", high as it is, can hardly be desirable for any government, although the current one appears to be missing the point entirely. Instead, it is trying, and failing, to present statistics in a manner that makes it look better.

In an ideal and truly democratic dispensation such a reaction from the government would be considered rather irresponsible and deliberately misleading.

Govt may fail to publish 'July Charter'

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the 17-year-long movement. We will give July its rightful recognition and grant it constitutional state honour. We will ensure that in the future, no ruler can raise a finger at July."

Chhatra Dal President Rakibul Islam Rakib said, "It is unfortunate that we are not seeing any initiative for trial regarding Chhatra League... Without justice for the victims of Chhatra League's actions, July will be in vain."

Regarding Jamaat-e-Islami, Rakib said, "A person who married the niece of a Jamaat nayebe-ameer led the chanting of disgraceful slogans against our top leader. If any attempt is made to create an unstable situation, there will be an appropriate response."

President of Dhaka University's Chhatra Union, Meghmalla Basu

said, "We want unity. But unity is only possible with those who believe in the ideology of Bangladesh. There can be no exemption for those who committed genocide in 1971 or in 2024."

Abu Bakr Mojumder, central convener of the Bangladesh Gantantrik Chhatra Sangsad, said, "In the attack that took place in front of Ekattor Hall on July 15 [last year], Chhatra Dal activists stood together and fought back. We were the coordinators, but the truth is that Chhatra Dal, Shibir, leftist organisations, and Islamic groups, all were with us. Without everyone, this uprising could never have been successful."

Leaders of several student organisations, except those from Chhatra Shibir, were present.