

# Grief turns into defiance

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On the public holiday marking Ashura, Dhaka and other parts of the country witnessed unrelenting student protests, road and highway blockades, symbolic funeral prayers, coffin processions, and repeated clashes with police and protestor activists.

Earlier in the day, students gathered outside Dhaka University's VC office, rejecting the hall closure and demanding justice for recent attacks and the killing of protesters. Police responded with sound grenades and tear gas. Similar protests and symbolic funeral prayers took place across other universities, including Jahangirnagar University, where students clashed with police throughout the day.

The Dhaka University campus remained tense throughout the day. From morning, heavy deployments of police, Rab, and BGB personnel with armoured vehicles were visible. As the coffin procession began, security forces launched a sudden assault, injuring at least 20 students, including several women, and 10 journalists. By 11:00pm, 35 more injured protesters were receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital from clashes in various parts of the capital.

At 2:00pm, students had planned to hold a funeral prayer and coffin procession at the base of the Raju Sculpture to mourn fellow students allegedly killed by police and Chhatra League attacks. Police blocked the prayer, which was later held in front of the VC's residence. As the procession began, officers launched a barrage of sound grenades and tear gas, dispersing the students. Protesters regrouped near Surya Sen Hall, triggering another hour-long clash. Police stationed themselves near the VC's residence, while students took position near Surya Sen Hall. The students retaliated with stones. By 5:30pm, they had retreated into the dorms.



## THE JULY THAT ROCKED BANGLADESH

JULY 17, 2024

At one point, Associate Professor Saiful Haque of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department intervened and urged police to stop firing tear gas, which they did. Students then moved towards Nilkhet, where police again launched tear gas. In response, protesters hurled bricks. They eventually dispersed into smaller groups, remaining on the campus periphery.

At 9:45pm, a fresh round of clashes erupted, starting in front of DU's Bangabandhu Tower and spreading to the Central Shaheed Minar, Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and Chankharpul. After about half an hour of confrontation, protesters moved towards Old Dhaka.

Although many students left their dorms by evening, several reported being harassed and assaulted by Chhatra League members near Shahbagh.

Activists of the ruling party held funeral prayers under the banner of freedom fighters, students, and the public at the National Museum premises. Afterward, they remained

there. Protesters leaving through Shahbagh were reportedly subjected to phone checks and beatings. Between 3:00pm and 3:30pm, at least three students were beaten, two of whom were rescued by police.

Despite the violence, many students—particularly women—stayed in their dormitories, declaring they would not leave without justice.

Meanwhile, university teachers retrieved two detained students from Shahbagh Police Station. Around 1:00pm, a group of teachers staged a silent march to the station and secured their release. Later, a "Teachers' Assembly Against Repression" was held at the base of Aparajeyo Bangla. Dr. Rushad Faridi of the Economics

all day. By evening, protesters clashed with police and engaged in running attacks. The clashes continued late into the night. Protesters reportedly set fire to the toll plaza of the Hanif Flyover. Demonstrators controlled the area from Jatrabari to Signboard, with police and Rab deployed in large numbers. Traffic on the flyover came to a halt.

Six people, including a two-year-old child, were wounded by shotgun pellets and taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, according to the hospital's police outpost.

The Chittagong University authorities announced the indefinite closure of the university. Female students were asked to vacate by 6:00pm today, and male students by



Protesters at Dhaka University held an absentee funeral on July 17, 2024, for those killed in the quota reform movement, with symbolic coffins wrapped in the national flag.

PHOTO: FILE/ORCHID CHAKMA

Department stated that police had coerced one student into a video confession admitting involvement in a movement to topple the government—evidence, he said, of growing state repression.

In Shonir Akhra, the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway remained blocked

10:00pm.

On a day meant for mourning, students across Bangladesh turned grief into defiance. Facing grenades, arrests, and state violence, they marched not just for quota reform—but for justice, dignity, and the right to shape the nation's future without fear.

## Of abandoned toys and unlived tomorrows

FROM PAGE 1  
Gope Women's Sports Complex in her memory.

"We heard about it," said Deepak. "But nothing feels important anymore when our daughter isn't here."

Six-year-old Jibir Ibrahim, the youngest in his family, was killed by police during a rally celebrating the fall of the government on August 5 in Uttara.

Jibir loved his birthday. May 19 was his favourite. He would scrawl it everywhere: on walls, notebooks, even on his hands. Since his death, his family no longer celebrates birthdays.

"Every birthday felt like Jibir's. He always cut the cake, even on his siblings' birthdays," said his mother, Rokeya. "Last month was my daughter's birthday, the month before was Jibir's, but we did nothing. It feels like birthdays don't exist anymore."

He was a picky eater, and Rokeya spent her days worrying about what to cook so he would eat. "Now I just lie in bed. There's no one left to feed," she said.

She spends hours looking through his photos, especially one taken minutes before he was shot, where Jibir holds up a victory sign. She's kept everything: his Spider-Man bag, his bicycle, his books, toys, and the bloodstained trousers he wore that day.

His father, Kabir Hossain, now lives among memories. He shares them online, unable to move past the weight of a loss too large for words.

The same grief weighs heavily on Abdul Matin and Jesmin Begum, parents of 14-year-old Abdul Motaleb, known as Munna.

An eighth-grader last year, Munna was shot near Jigatola and later found dead at the central Shaheed Minar,

where students carried his body in a solemn procession.

"My son was kind-hearted, always ready to help others," recalled Matin, a tannery worker. "I told his mother not to let him go out during protests; if needed, to keep him tied at home."

"On the day it happened, we had lunch together. I saw him resting, but after I left for work, he went out to join the protests, and was shot."

Munna didn't have a phone. After the pandemic began, he used his father's for online classes and made a few TikTok videos.

"When the pain gets too heavy, we watch those videos," said Matin.

Birthdays in their conservative family were simple. Munna would bring his own cake and share it with everyone. But last December, his birthday passed in silence—no cake, no celebration.

Even Eid, the day of joy for Muslims twice a year, has become a reminder of Munna's absence. During Munna's last Eid-ul-Azha, Matin found him at the cattle market in a volunteer's uniform, helping buyers.

At first, Matin felt angry—who had told him to do this? Was money so tight that Munna needed to work?

But Munna explained he wasn't there for money, only to spend time with friends and help others while school was closed.

"This year, at the cattle market, I found myself searching for Munna, even though I know he's gone," Matin whispered, his voice heavy with grief.

But grief is not the only burden these families carry. The pursuit of justice has become yet another endless road, filled with uncertainty, bureaucracy, and silence.

Some parents tried to file cases, only to be turned away or discouraged. Others managed to open cases, but there have been no arrests, no

updates, no accountability.

Deepak, for example, never intended to file a case. "What would we have gained? Our daughter is gone. Nothing can bring her back," he said.

However, on July 1, around 11 months after Riya's death, police filed a case against up to 200 unidentified individuals, allegedly affiliated with the Awami League and its associate groups.

Meanwhile, Munna's father, Matin, said they filed a case at Dhanmondi Model Police Station but have no idea about its progress.

"Sometimes the police call to check if we are facing any threats, but other than that, there is no update," he said.

Jibir's mother, Rokeya, also informed this correspondent that although they filed a case against the personnel of Uttara East Police Station, the perpetrators remain absconding, and there have been no updates.

In the case of 11-year-old Sufkat Samir from Mirpur 14, shot in the eye while closing a window on July 19, the bullet pierced his skull and exited, killing him instantly.

His father, Sakibur Rahman, said he was summoned to Kafrul Police Station that night through a local Awami League leader, where he was initially pressured to sign a statement saying he did not want to pursue a case.

Later, following extensive media coverage, the police compelled him to file another case in court against some prominent Awami League leaders. It was later discovered that the accused in that

case included the names of two of the group's rivals in a property dispute.

Although Sakibur appeared in court eight times and submitted affidavits stating that these men were not involved in his son's death, one innocent man was jailed for five months before being released on bail.

To date, there has been no progress in identifying or prosecuting the real perpetrator responsible for Sufkat's death.

But these deaths are only part of the tragedy. Many children were never counted, while countless others now live with injuries and silent wounds and trauma from what they saw and whom they lost.

"We don't even know how many street children died," said Child Protection Specialist Gawher Nayeem Wahra. "No one tried to find out, because children simply aren't on our agenda."

Wahra noted that survivors often saw violence firsthand and now need counselling and safe spaces to heal.

"Children hold memories deeply. They can recover, but only if given space. Schools, TV programmes, and families offer nothing to help them heal," he said.

He also warned against involving children under 18 in politics, especially with the election approaching. Without careful protection, more children could lose their lives during turmoil.

But beyond warnings and statistics, for the parents left behind, every sunrise is a reminder of what was lost. And every silence echoes with the laughter that won't return.

Leaving through Jibir's unfinished notebooks and the award he received at his last art competition, his mother Rokeya whispered, "If this country cannot protect its children, then what future are we even fighting for?"

He then warned, "If justice is not delivered swiftly, we will return to Gopalganj and take responsibility ourselves to free the district from their grip."

Before the start of the NCP rally, a group of people smashed the sound systems and chairs and hurled crude bombs.

After the rally concluded, the site was ransacked again and set on fire. A fresh round of violence broke out in the Poura Park area, as a group belonging to the banned Bangladesh Chhatra League attempted to attack the vehicles carrying NCP leaders. This led to a chase and counter-chase between the attackers and law enforcers.

Law enforcers then tried to control the situation by firing sound grenades and blank shots. Army members later joined the policing efforts.

NCP activists were seen leaving the

## Iran seizes foreign tanker over fuel smuggling

AFP, Tehran

Iran has seized a foreign tanker in the Sea of Oman on charges of fuel smuggling, the judiciary said yesterday.

The vessel was intercepted "after legal documents related to its cargo were found to be incomplete," said Mojtaba Ghahremani, head of the judiciary in southern Hormozgan province, according to the judiciary's Mizan Online outlet.

He added that the ship was reportedly carrying two million litres of smuggled fuel.

"Seventeen suspects, including the captain and crew of the foreign tanker, have been taken into custody," Ghahremani said, without elaborating on the identity and nationality of those arrested.

Authorities are conducting laboratory tests and reviewing documents to verify the cargo's contents and legality, the report added.

The seizure comes months after Iran's Revolutionary Guards intercepted two Tanzanian-flagged tankers allegedly transporting 1.5 million litres of diesel in the Gulf.

Those vessels were later transferred to the port of Bushehr for legal proceedings.

The vessels, the Sea Ranger and Salama, had 25 foreign crew members, according to Iranian media.

## CYBERSCAM CRACKDOWN

## Cambodia arrests over 200 Vietnam citizens

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian authorities have arrested more than 200 Vietnamese nationals in internet scam centre raids, police said yesterday, as Prime Minister Hun Manet ordered a crackdown on cybercrime sweatshops.

The United Nations has described Southeast Asia as the "ground zero" of scam centres, where workers typically use romance or business cons to defraud social media users of an estimated \$40 billion annually.

Hun Manet issued a directive made public on Tuesday, telling law enforcement and the military "to prevent and crack down on online scams", warning they risk losing their jobs if they fail to take action.

## Four killed as violence grips

FROM PAGE 1

Dipto's uncle told reporters at the hospital that his nephew was going to his shop after lunch when he was shot in the abdomen in the Chowrangli area of the town.

A grocer working in the area, requesting anonymity, said he saw two people collapse on the street as security forces opened fire to disperse the agitating crowd.

NCP yesterday held protest programmes in several districts, including Chittagong and Noakhali, condemning the attack.

Demanding the arrest of the culprits within the next 24 hours, NCP Convener Nahid Islam at a press conference in Khulna last night said the attacks were carried out to kill them.

"After concluding our rally in Gopalganj, we were heading towards Madaripur when armed goons of the Awami League attacked our motorcade," Nahid said.

Despite the attack, he said, the NCP will hold a rally in Faridpur today as part of its month-long programme.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing condemned the "utterly indefensible" attack on leaders and activists of the NCP and said it will not go unpunished.

Political parties, including BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, also condemned the attack.

According to witnesses, around 1:45pm, before the start of the rally, around 200-300 people armed with sticks vandalised the stage and tore apart the banner. They also exploded some crude bombs.

The police personnel were seen to retreat to the nearby court area during the attack. NCP leaders and activists also fled, they said.

NCP leaders and activists alleged that the attackers were supporters of the AL and the banned Chhatra League.

At one point, Gopalganj Superintendent of Police Md Mizanur Rahman showed up at the scene. Then the NCP activists and police jointly chased the attackers away.

Around 2:05pm, NCP Convener Nahid Islam, Member Secretary Akhtar Hossain, Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah, Chief Organiser (North) Sarjis Alam, and other central leaders arrived at the venue.

No untoward incidents took place during the rally.

After the rally, as NCP members were heading to Chowrangli area, their motorcade came under attack by a group of individuals armed with sticks and batons.

Law enforcers then tried to control the situation by firing sound grenades and blank shots. Army members later joined the policing efforts.

NCP activists were seen leaving the

spot, turning their vehicles around.

A live TV clip showed that key NCP leaders Nahid, Hasnat, and Sarjis were whisked away from the area in an Armoured Personnel Carrier of the Bangladesh Army.

Section 144 was then imposed in Gopalganj, and four platoons of Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) were deployed in the area around 4:00pm.

According to witnesses, a police vehicle was attacked and set ablaze in Khatiachar on the Ulpur Durgapur road around 9:30am. Three police officers were reportedly injured.

Later, around 11:30am, the car of the upazila nirbahi officer of Sadar upazila was also attacked on the same road.

UNO M Rakibul Hasan said, "After learning about the untoward incident involving the attack on a police vehicle, I visited the area. On my way back, when we reached Kansur, a group attacked our vehicle. The driver, Mohammad Hamim, was injured."

Mohammad Abdul Mabud, additional deputy inspector general (Admin & Finance) of Dhaka Range, told The Daily Star around 10:00pm, "A group of armed criminals carried out a