

Tajuddin Ahmad

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In 1971, while Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was imprisoned in Pakistan, Tajuddin Ahmad was entrusted with the responsibility of leading the liberation effort. He formed the provisional government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and, as prime minister, led the country through the armed struggle against Pakistan.

Following independence, he served as prime minister until Sheikh Mujib's return to the country. He later took on the role of finance and planning minister in Sheikh Mujib's cabinet. On October 26, 1974, he resigned as per Sheikh Mujib's directive.

After Sheikh Mujib was assassinated on August 15, 1975, Tajuddin Ahmad was placed under house arrest.

On the night of November 3, 1975, while imprisoned in Dhaka Central Jail, he was brutally murdered along with three other national leaders – AHM Qamaruzzaman, M Mansur Ali, and Syed Nazrul Islam.

Judicial panel

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"On July 16, several unexpected incidents occurred centring around a rally organised by a new political party. Lives were lost. Nothing is more valuable than human life," the adviser said.

On that day, daylong running battles involving Awami League followers and law enforcers over a National Citizen Party (NCP) rally in the southern district town killed at least five people and injured more than 50.

"The chief adviser sent us here to convey his message that the government is deeply concerned about the incident and wants to ensure such occurrences never happen again. The administration has been instructed to take all necessary measures in this regard," he said.

Fouzul Kabir said his visit is an initial fact-finding mission.

"The commission will investigate the events thoroughly. I urge journalists to assist the commission by providing information and evidence. Through the commission's report, we will learn what actually happened, why it happened, and what could have been done to prevent it," he said.

He said that the scale of violence on July 16 took everyone by surprise, and the government wants to draw lessons from it.

"Despite limited resources, law enforcement agencies and the army put great effort into handling the situation. Many of them, along with journalists, were injured while performing their duties. We are here to appreciate their commitment," he said, adding that those responsible for attacking police or torching vehicles would be brought to justice.

"We will make every effort to ensure that normal life, business activities, and peace are not disrupted further," he said.

Meanwhile, three more people were arrested in raids in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of arrestees to 325 in connection with the violence, said police.

Bangladesh writes

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USTR fixes a date for the talks, he said.

Upon the return from the second round of negotiations, Bangladesh has prepared its formal proposal to the US as the negotiations will have to be completed by the end of this month.

The Trump administration is scheduled to impose new reciprocal tariff rates for the countries concerned from August 1 unless the pause on reciprocal tariff schedule is extended further.

The position paper outlines Bangladesh's commitments to increase imports of US goods and reduce duties on certain items, along with non-trade commitments that the government has deemed non-harmful.

Bangladesh has agreed to reduce tariffs on several US goods and increase imports from that country as part of the broader negotiation process.

For example, the government signed an agreement on Sunday to import 0.7 million tonnes of wheat from American suppliers annually. Talks are also at an advanced stage to procure 14 Boeing aircraft.

Some 1,322 factories, which are members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and mainly export products to the US, will face a difficult time if the tariff rate is not reduced at the end of the negotiations.

Of the factories, 100 export 91-100 percent of their goods to America, according to data from the BGMEA.

Forty-six companies export 81-90 percent of their goods to the United States; 91 export 61-80 percent; 87 export 41-60 percent; 176 export 21-40 percent; and 822 export up to 20 percent, the BGMEA data said.

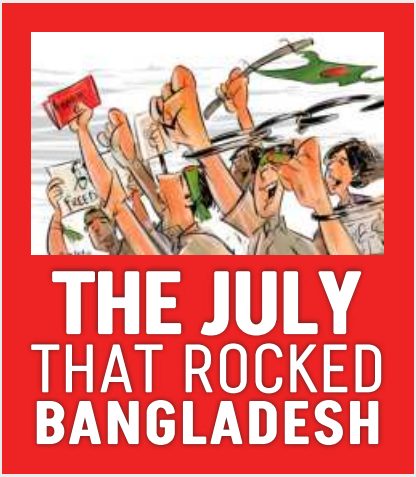
Bangladesh seeks zero duty or a tariff rate lower than Vietnam's.

Due to the new 35 percent tariff imposed by the Trump administration, the local exporters fear losing the competitiveness in the US market, where Bangladesh last year exported garment items worth over \$8.2 billion.

BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan, who is hopeful for a reduced tariff in America, said the extension of the pause is up to the Trump administration as the time is running fast towards August 1.

However, the US retailers and brands expect that the tariff rate will be borne by the local garment and fabrics suppliers to reduce the burden of the 35 percent tariff, he added.

Mass arrests and crackdown continue



JULY 23, 2024

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

On July 23, 2024, the government issued a circular radically overhauling the quota system in public service recruitment. According to the new directive, 93 percent of civil service positions would now be filled through merit-based recruitment, up from the previous 44 percent, while the remaining 7 percent would be reserved under various quotas.

The circular, which came in line with the Supreme Court's order, was to take immediate effect and apply across all grades of government, semi-government, autonomous, semi-autonomous, statutory bodies, and corporations in the case of direct recruitment via examinations.

Student leaders rejected the circular outright, saying it lacked proper consultation. At a press briefing held at the Dhaka Reporters Unity, Nahid Islam, one of the key coordinators of the quota reform protests, stated, "Before issuing the circular, the authorities should have held a dialogue with students and other stakeholders. We'll not accept the circular as the final resolution."

He strongly criticised the government for the bloodshed and loss of life. "We demand a policy-making dialogue involving the stakeholders in a conducive environment. Besides, we urge the government to form an independent commission to avoid such controversies in the future," he said. He reaffirmed that the movement would continue until justice was delivered for those killed and injured.

Meanwhile, the state's crackdown on



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A prison van carrying over 40 individuals, who had been arrested the previous day in connection with violence, arrived at the CMM Court. Around 500 detainees were produced before the court, which sent most of them to jail on the afternoon of July 23, 2024.

injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital in the morning. An unidentified youth, aged around 22, died at the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital. Another youth, Shuvo Shil, 24, passed away at a hospital in Savar. These fatalities brought the total number of deaths since July 16 to at least 150.

United Nations, the United States, and the United Kingdom all condemned the bloodshed during the student protests. Expressing alarm over the situation, they raised concerns about its potential impacts on the economy and the broader well-being of the Bangladeshi people.

Grief gives way to rage at Milestone

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Besides, the students called for a public apology over the assault on teachers and students by military personnel at the crash site on Monday, videos of which have gone viral on social media.

The students planned their sit-in from 9:00am. However, an announcement was made via loudspeaker by the Diabari army camp, prohibiting all forms of gatherings, demonstrations, or sit-ins in and around the Diabari roundabout. This further angered the students.

Around 10:30am, Education Adviser Prof CR Abrar, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul and CA's press wing members went to the campus, but they were surrounded by protesting students who alleged negligence.

The advisers and press wing members later held a closed-door meeting with teachers and a few student representatives in Building 5, while hundreds continued chanting slogans outside.

Tensions escalated around 2:13pm when hundreds of students chanted "Bhua, Bhua" ("fake, fake") and clashed with police guarding the building where the meeting was taking place.

Protesters threw brick chunks and blocked journalists, accusing the media of misreporting the number of casualties, said witnesses.

The police then momentarily drove

the students away and vacated the area, which enraged the students further.

After assurances from the college authorities about their demands being met, the students left the area but stayed outside the college gate.

Following the meeting, Prof Nazrul addressed the students and said, "Your demands are reasonable. On behalf of the government, I assure you that they will be fulfilled. We are here as guardians to express our sympathy."

"Steps are underway for compensation, rehabilitation, and trauma management support for the affected families."

He also assured students that directives would be issued to the air force to avoid flying aircraft over densely populated areas.

Addressing allegations that students were assaulted by army personnel after the crash, the adviser said, "On behalf of the government, we apologise for the misconduct by the force members who behaved inappropriately with you. We will take appropriate action regarding this."

However, the words did not assure the protesting students. After his remarks, students began chanting slogans calling the adviser a "fraud". The situation became chaotic as shoving and scuffles broke out, forcing the advisers to retreat into Building 5 again, where they

remained until after 7:30pm.

Escorted by many police personnel, they left the campus around 3:25pm.

However, their path was blocked near the MRT-6 depot, and the cars carrying them were forced to turn back and return to the campus.

The campus bore an eerie look, devoid of all students except residential HSC examinees. All classes were suspended, and the senior students huddled in the playing ground or on campus, watching and re-watching videos of the crash on their phones.

The entire time, planes flew over their heads, descending onto Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. Milestone School & College is directly under the short finals for planes. Each time a plane flew by, the teenagers gazed at the sky.

"One of the first things I saw was the body of a woman with no head, cut clean from her left shoulder," claimed a teenager. The Daily Star is yet to find a body matching that description.

Some teenage boys had spent the night on the field. Staying vigil on the field, they counted ambulances coming in and going on.

"I saw an ambulance coming in around 1:00am and picking up a body," said another teenager. "Later around 3:00am, the girls spotted another

ambulance from their hostel and informed us."

The horrifying extent of burns on the victims, the lack of clear communication from authorities until yesterday, and the heavy-handed attitude of the military on Monday led the students to believe that the government is hiding the actual number of deaths.

Not one teenager this correspondent spoke to said that they believe the government's death toll.

"Just one classroom had over 50 students! They were so burnt! We saw the bodies! Where are they now?" asked one.

Meanwhile, some senior-year students were spotted leaving the campus.

"I just can't stay here. I will become sick. I need to get away. My home is in Brahmanbaria, but I will stay with a relative in Dhaka for now," said a female student dragging a suitcase.

Meanwhile, army has launched an investigation into an "unwanted incident" during rescue efforts following the jet crash.

According to an ISPR statement, the incident resulted from a misunderstanding between on-duty army personnel, volunteers, and onlookers. Action will be taken against those found responsible after the probe, it said.

From chirps to silence

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Nearby, a metal swing set, eerily untouched, swayed gently in the breeze as if mourning in silence.

Yellow caution tape was wrapped around trees and poles just outside the entrance, while volunteers, mostly students from the institution, were on guard, determined to prevent anyone from entering.

People came in waves – parents, students, teachers, local residents and onlookers – to see and mourn. Some wiped away tears, others remained silent, their faces etched with shock. Most of them struggled to come to terms with how so many young lives were lost in the blink of an eye as the death toll from the deadliest jet crash reached 32 yesterday.

"It's hard to believe children were playing here just the day before," said Nasima Akhter.

She arrived with her husband and daughter from Pallabi, drawn by the weight of the tragedy. "I couldn't stop myself from coming here after seeing the devastating scenes on television," she said, her voice trembling. "It's impossible to imagine what the parents of those children are going through."

"Schools are regarded as safe havens for children. Once parents drop their child at the school gate, they breathe

a sigh of relief, trusting their child will spend quality time in a secure and playful environment. That sense of security was shattered," she added.

As the day wore on, the crowd of onlookers swelled. Some came to express their outrage over military aircraft conducting training exercises above such a densely populated area. Others wandered silently, capturing the devastation on their phones, snapping photos, recording videos, and even livestreaming the haunting image of the ill-fated building to their relatives.

From time to time, planes descended toward the nearby airport – an ordinary sight on any other day. But yesterday, each engine rumble overhead jarred the visitors, drawing their eyes skyward in instinctive alarm.

But inside the building, silence reigned. Students' green desks and chairs lay warped and melted, their cheerful colours blackened by fire. Textbooks, backpacks, and shoes – some singed – lie eerily in place, as if time froze.

On one of the iron window bars on the ground floor, a partially burnt, soot-covered children's book for class 5 clung. Just beneath, several exercise books for English and mathematics, also partly burnt, lie scattered on the ground. The exercise books had "Asmaul Husna Zaira, class-3" written

on them.

"Only the Almighty knows whether this little girl [Asmaul] is alive or not. Her books may be burnt, but I hope and pray she survived," said a middle-aged man, gently examining the charred exercise books. He is a resident of Uttara, drawn to school by the heartbreak.

Once a student hostel, the two-storey building named "Haider Ali Bhaban" had been repurposed into an academic block. The ground floor held a dozen rooms, mostly serving as classrooms for various sections of classes 3, 4, and 5. At one end was a toilet, with another tucked just beyond the staircase.

The ground floor also housed two separate rooms for coordinators and teachers and a meeting room for the principal. Above, the second floor mirrored the layout, with another 12 rooms dedicated to classes 6, 7, and 8.

Each floor had a long corridor lined with iron window bars, meant to protect. It was there that many students had gathered after the end of their school day – some chatting, others waiting for their coaching classes to begin – when the plane struck the building. Now, that same corridor lies covered in soot and debris.

"Doesn't it look like a cage? How did the children manage to come out of the flames?" a young woman in her mid-

30s asked her companion, pointing at the iron window bars.

No one, however, could exactly say how many students were in the building at the time of the crash.

Yards away, Khorshed Alam, a father, was narrating how his fifth-grader son survived narrowly.

"My son's classroom was the second room from the east end. His classes ended at 1:00pm and he left with a few friends just minutes before the plane slammed into the building. The classmates who stayed behind were injured."

"I don't understand why a training aircraft had to be flown over such a densely populated area. The authorities must take responsibility," he said, his voice trembling with anger.

Amid the grief and shock, the Milestone School and College campus erupted in protest. Several hundred students gathered on the campus grounds from the morning.

"We need to know exactly how many of our brothers died in the crash," one student said. "The authorities must be transparent – no more hiding, no more silence." Students called off their demonstration in the evening.

And as the last of the students left the compound, the silence returned, heavy and unrelenting, echoing with the memory of lives lost forever.

‘Important

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Uttara was just empty land. But now, look at it."

He made the remarks while addressing journalists on the tarmac of the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) Base Bir Uttam AK Khandker located next to the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Kurmitola.

"This is our main base... this is our most important space. All the VIPs live here, our structures are here, and the parliament is here. There is a matter of protection. So, it's very important to have a strong air base here."

On Monday afternoon, shortly after taking off from this air base, the F-7 BGI jet, piloted by flight lieutenant Towkir Islam, encountered a "mechanical failure", before plunging from the air into the school building in Uttara's Diabari.

"There's been talk that these aircraft are old. But fighter jets don't become outdated quickly," he said, adding, "They typically have a 30-year life cycle. One or two decades is not an issue; it's about proper maintenance. And I assure you, we make no compromises."

The air chief said BAF receives all necessary maintenance support and technology from the countries from which it procures the aircraft.

"The engines are maintained according to flight-hour limits, never beyond. Technologically, they may be old, but the aircraft are airworthy. We're also working on bringing in newer-generation jets. But even modern jets crash; there's no guarantee. What matters is proper maintenance, and we do that here and abroad."

Asked whether the crash was caused by a mechanical failure, he said a high-level investigation committee has been formed.

"The committee will determine the cause of the accident. If we find any fault or shortcoming, we will take corrective action."

He said speculation spread online due to a lack of complete information.

"Many people don't understand aviation. That's why misinformation spreads. I can't give my personal assumption before the investigation report. If the pilot had survived, or the aircraft remained intact, we'd have known more. But both are gone. So please, have patience."

The air chief also described the pilot's final actions before the crash.

"When the aircraft went out of control, the pilot made every effort to steer it toward an empty space. He found a field and tried to land there. But his effort didn't succeed; the aircraft struck the building instead."

"In trying to avoid civilian casualties, he delayed ejecting from the plane. That delay cost him his life. We held his funeral today. He gave his life in the line of duty, and I offer my deepest condolences to his family."

Hasan Mahmood was visibly emotional throughout the briefing, held shortly after a visit to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), where many of the injured were being treated.

"Before coming here, I visited CMH. I will go to the burn unit soon. The air force stands firmly beside the victims' families. This death toll is deeply painful to me. But I hope it will not rise much further, in sha Allah."

"I pray for the souls of the deceased and extend heartfelt condolences to their families."

He urged the public not to believe rumours circulating on social media.

"A strong air force is essential for our sovereignty. Do not weaken this pillar with rumours. We are releasing all updates through ISPR as soon as they are available."

Raisa Moni found

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home. "I went to Dhaka Medical, CMH, Uttara Adhunik, and four other hospitals. I can't find our Raisa," he said on Monday night.

After a day of relentless searching, Raisa's charred body was discovered and identified at Dhaka's Combined Military Hospital (CMH), her uncle Imdadul Sheikh told The Daily Star at 8:45pm last night.

Raisa is among the 31 who have died so far in the fatal jet crash.

Earlier in the afternoon, the child's father, Shahabul Sheikh, a businessperson, identified her body at the CMH morgue.

The family, hailing from Faridpur's Alfadanga upazila, currently live in the capital's Mirpur area.

Raisa was the second of three siblings, with an elder sister and a younger brother.

Her uncle Imdadul told this correspondent, "Since the crash, we had been searching frantically for Raisa."

"Today [yesterday] around 1:30–2:00pm, we received confirmation that she is no longer with us. Her father identified her body."

He said Raisa suffered 80 percent burns, mostly from her head to abdomen. Despite the severity of the injuries, her father was able to identify her face.

Following the identification, Raisa's remains were sent from CMH to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for DNA sampling.

Police said her body would be handed over to the family after the samples were collected.

Once released, her body will be taken to her ancestral home in Bajra village in Alfadanga upazila, where she will be laid to rest.