

# A nation in grief and defiance

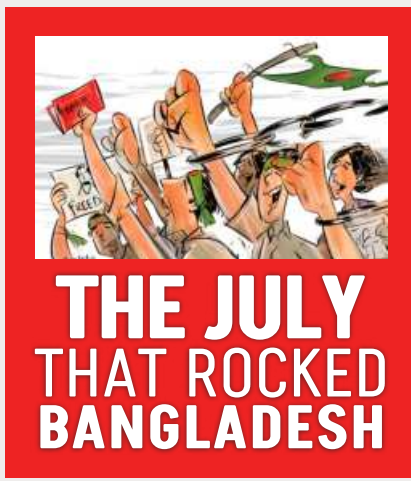
SHAMSUDDOZA SAJAN

On July 25, 2024, two more individuals – Zaman Mia, 19, a garment worker from Narsingdi, and Zakir Hossain, 29, a tailor shop employee from Rayerbagh – succumbed to their bullet wounds at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, according to hospital sources and their families. Their deaths brought the official death toll since July 16 to at least 156, including three members of the police force. Thousands more had been injured in clashes that pitted protesters against state forces, often backed by ruling party activists.

Public hospitals struggled to cope with the flood of casualties. At the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), the human cost of the violence was etched into every bed. Md Rifat, a 10th-grade student from Badda Alatumessa Higher Secondary School, lay staring at the absence of his right leg. He was shot in Rampura on July 19 while drinking sherbet and watching events unfold. "I just wanted to see what was going on. I wasn't protesting," he said, choking back tears. After two surgeries, doctors were forced to amputate his leg from the knee. "I don't know whether I'll be able to go to school again," he whispered.

In the same ward, Imran Sarkar, a fourth-year philosophy student at Dhaka College, was trying to adjust to life without his left leg. He was shot in Rayerbazar on July 19 while returning home from Juma prayers. "All of a sudden, a bullet hit my left leg and I passed out," he recounted.

Amid this mounting human toll, the



JULY 25, 2024



FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN  
A man reaching out to speak to a detainee inside a prison van at the CMM court in Dhaka on July 25, 2024, amid mass arrests during the uprising.

state's crackdown intensified. Over the past six days, at least 4,784 people had been arrested across the country. The BNP claimed that its joint secretary general, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anne, was picked up by the Detective Branch from Elephant Road around 4:30pm.

Meanwhile, digital silence prevailed. Social media platforms remained blocked, enforced by international internet gateway (IIG) operators on orders from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, TikTok, and others were inaccessible. The previous day, state minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak had accused companies like Facebook and YouTube of failing to comply with Bangladeshi laws, prompting the

government's clampdown on digital platforms.

The international community responded with growing concern. The United Nations and Amnesty International issued strong statements calling for an end to the violent repression of protesters and the restoration of communication channels. UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk demanded that the government disclose the names of those killed, injured, or detained, and offered UN support for investigating the alleged human rights violations.

Back home, then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina visited the vandalised Mirpur-10 metro rail station and urged citizens to hold the perpetrators accountable. "They [the people] have to try the culprits. I am seeking justice

from them," she said. Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader added that the prime minister would personally take responsibility for supporting the families of the deceased.

The government declared that the ongoing nationwide curfew would continue until further notice. Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir demanded an international investigation into the protest-related casualties, dismissing the government's proposed judicial inquiry as a cover-up. He also called for compensation for the families of all those killed, including police and Ansar members.

Transport disruptions persisted. Bangladesh Railway announced that all passenger and freight train services would remain suspended until the situation stabilised.

Despite these challenges, the protesters vowed to continue their movement. A statement issued by Abdul Hannan Masud, a protest coordinator, announced that prayer gatherings would be held in mosques and temples to mourn the dead. Emergency medical teams would also be formed to support the roughly 15,000 injured demonstrators nationwide.

As July 25 came to a close, Bangladesh stood at a painful crossroads. A movement born from frustration had now become a national reckoning. In the face of death, disability, repression, and silence, the call for justice remained unrelenting. The people were not only mourning the dead – they were refusing to forget them.

## GOPALGANJ VIOLENCE

# Govt forms 6-member probe body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday formed a six-member inquiry commission to investigate the violence centring the pre-scheduled rally of National Citizen Party in Gopalganj on July 16.

The commission would look into the deterioration of law and order, attacks on the district jail and other government establishments, disruption of public safety, and other related incidents, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said in a statement.

The commission, headed by former justice Md Abu Tariq of the Supreme Court, has been asked to submit its report along with specific opinions and recommendations to the relevant ministry within three weeks.

Other members are Khandaker Md Mahabubur Rahman, additional secretary of Public Security Division; Md Saiful Islam, additional secretary (Senior District and Sessions Judge); Brig Gen Shahidur Rahman Osmani, commander of the 21st Infantry Brigade; Additional Inspector General of Police Sardar Nurul Amin, director, Central Police Hospital in Dhaka; and Sajjad Siddiqui, chairman of Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Dhaka University.

The commission was constituted under section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1956 with the aim of conducting a comprehensive investigation into the said incidents. It was formed following the recommendations of the investigation committee constituted after the incident.

The commission's mandate includes unearthing the underlying causes of the incident, identifying the individuals or organisations responsible for the attack on the NCP rally, recommending legal actions against those responsible, analysing the attacks on the district jail and other government establishments as well as the disruption of public safety during the incident, and providing recommendations on preventing such untoward incidents in the future.

The commission may, if necessary, include any appropriate person as a member.

## List killings by the AL, its affiliates, state forces: Yunus

FROM PAGE 1

The instruction came during yesterday's meeting at the state guesthouse Jamuna, where the family of slain BUET student Abrar Fahad met the chief adviser. Abrar's father Mohammad Barkat Ullah, his younger brother Abrar Fayaz, and uncle Mohammad Mofazzal Hossain were present.

The family requested probes into all political killings allegedly carried out by the then ruling party-backed groups before the uprising.

Abrar's father also urged the government to take initiatives to expedite the trial of the Abrar murder case.

"My son was brutally beaten to death by political thugs for speaking out for the country," said the father. "He raised his voice against unequal water-sharing deals.

"His mother still mourns her son every day. No other mother should have to endure such a loss. No mothers should lose their children this way."

He also appealed to the chief adviser to take steps to build a long-demanded bridge over the Gorai river in Kushtia, saying that some 30,000 people are suffering due to the absence of a bridge.

Abrar Fayaz, a third-year student at BUET, urged the government to make educational institutions more student-friendly.

"Our campuses still lack essential labs, equipment, and resources for learning. We have high hopes for the interim government," said Fayaz. "We want it to take effective steps to make educational institutions more supportive of students."

He also called on the authorities to take strict measures against ragging at BUET.

"This was not the first incident of abuse at BUET," he said. "There have been others. Those cases also need to be investigated and justice delivered."

Yunus said the brutal killing of Abrar had shocked the entire nation.

"The perpetrators will be brought to justice. Each killing carried out by party-affiliated groups before the July 24 uprising will be investigated, as will those executed using state forces on government orders. The government has already begun taking action."

Abrar, a second-year student, was beaten to death on October 6, 2019, at Sher-e-Bangla Hall by leaders and activists of the BUET unit of Chhatra League, now a banned organisation.

The incident triggered nationwide protests and outrage, prompting the university to ban all forms of student politics on campus.

On December 8, 2021, a Dhaka court sentenced the accused. On March 16 this year, the High Court upheld the trial court verdict sentencing 20 BUET students to death and five others to life imprisonment.

## New pay panel formed for govt staff

FROM PAGE 1

### PAY COMMISSION

Briefing reporters at the Foreign Service Academy, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shaiful Alam said the new pay commission will be headed by Zakir Ahmed Khan, a former finance secretary and current chairman of the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation.

The commission has been tasked with submitting its report within six months.

Shaiful said the commission was formed in response to the sustained inflationary pressures since the last pay scale revision in 2015.

Under the Eighth National Pay Scale introduced that year, government salaries saw significant hikes. In the highest of 20 grades, the basic salary was raised by 95 percent to a fixed rate of Tk 78,000, while the lowest grade saw a 101 percent hike to Tk 8,250.

The scale also introduced annual increments and a festival bonus for Bangla New Year, though time scale and selection grade provisions were discontinued.

Currently, the government employs around 15 lakh officials and staff across the country.

### NO ARBITRARY ARREST

Addressing the changes to the CrPC, Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul told reporters, "After arresting someone and taking them to the police station, their family must be informed. Under

no circumstances can it take more than 12 hours. If the arrested person feels unwell, arrangements for their treatment must be made."

The new provisions also require police officers to carry identity cards and display nameplates. If asked, they must reveal their identity during an arrest.

The amendment significantly alters section 54 of the CrPC, which governs arrests on suspicion. Now, an arresting officer must have witnessed the offence or have reasonable grounds to believe the person committed it. A written explanation detailing the reasons for arrest must be provided, applicable to both cognisable and non-cognisable offences.

Furthermore, the officer must be convinced the person may abscond if not arrested. Both these conditions must be fulfilled before an arrest under section 54 is deemed lawful.

The amendment also allows submission of bail bonds online and the issuance of digital summons.

"If properly implemented, this law will play a transformative role in preventing arbitrary arrests, denial of arrest, and enforced disappearances," said Asif Nazrul.

Both the constitution and the CrPC require any arrested individual to be presented before a magistrate within 24 hours. The High Court has also instructed that families be notified

immediately upon arrest.

### LOCAL POLLS

In a major change to the local electoral landscape, the advisory council decided to remove political party symbols from elections to union parishes, municipalities, upazila parishes, and city corporations.

At the briefing, LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan said the council approved, in principle, the following ordinances to implement this change: the Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025; Upazila Parishad (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025; Local Government (Municipality) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025; and Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul noted that the provision for party-based local polls had been introduced by the previous government. "We are returning to the previous system (when local elections were held without party symbols)," he said.

### LABOUR RIGHTS

The council also approved a proposal to ratify three International Labour Organization conventions: Convention 155 and Convention 187 on occupational safety and health, and Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace.

## Former chief justice Khairul arrested

FROM PAGE 1

the hearing began, and the former chief justice remained silent in the dock.

There was no lawyer to represent him.

A group of pro-BNP lawyers, meanwhile, staged demonstrations, demanding his trial.

On July 6, Ala Uddin, 61, a BNP leader in Noakhali, filed the case in connection with killing of 16-year-old Kaiyum with Jatrabari Police Station, accusing ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, justice Khairul, and 465 others.

Besides, 1,000 to 2,000 unnamed Awami League activists and 100 to 150 law enforcers were also accused in the case.

At house in Dhanmondi yesterday morning, the Detective Branch of police arrested Justice Khairul, who has been widely criticised for abolishing the nonparty caretaker government system through a landmark but divisive Supreme Court verdict in 2011.

The sudden detention of the former top judge has sparked fierce political and legal debate.

Pro-BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami lawyers accuse him of destroying a vital democratic mechanism and enabling long-term political control through his controversial interpretation of the constitution.

"He committed a fraud upon the judiciary and democracy," said AM Mahub Uddin Khokon, BNP leader and president of the Supreme Court Bar Association.

"Receiving Tk 39 lakh from the prime minister's relief fund for treatment and signing the final judgment on the case of 13th amendment of the constitution

16 months after retirement is unprecedented and unacceptable," he said while talking to The Daily Star at the SC premises.

Zainul Abedin, convener of Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Ainjibi Forum, a body of pro-BNP lawyers, told reporters that the "Aynaghar (the secret detention centres) was built because of the former chief justice.

"By destroying democracy, he opened the way for the killings of thousands of people. Therefore, his trial must be held in the people's court. It must be in the open court."

The lawyer said, "Khairul Haque threw BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia out of Shaheed Zia's cantonment house through a verdict. He set a precedent of judicial dishonesty. Justice Khairul Haque grabbed the post of the Law Commission chairman in exchange for the verdict scrapping the caretaker government system. Khairul Haque should be tried in such a way that other judges will be careful after seeing it."

Kayser Kamal, secretary general of BIAF, called for exemplary punishment, alleging that Justice Khairul's actions destroyed public confidence in the judiciary.

Talking to this newspaper, Mohammad Shishir Manir, a pro-Jamaat lawyer, said the former chief justice committed "fraud upon the judicial process".

"He changed the short order of the 13th Amendment judgment and thereby violated the code of conduct of the judges of the Supreme Court. He also violated the oath of the judges incorporated in the constitution. He should be suitably punished.

"If in the short order it was stated that the next two general elections

## 5 bodies identified

FROM PAGE 1

The five had previously been listed as missing in a list published by Milestone authorities yesterday morning.

Four days after the crash, confusion persists over the death toll.

Around 9:00pm yesterday, the health ministry put the count at 31, including two more students who succumbed to their injuries at the burn institute yesterday.

Of the two, Mahtab Uddin Bhuiyan, 13, a seventh grader with 85 percent burns, died around 1:50pm, while eighth grader Mahia passed away with 50 percent burns around 4:30pm.

In a press release on Tuesday, the ISPR had said the fatalities stood at 31. Around 12:15am on Wednesday, another person undergoing treatment at the burn institute died, prompting media outlets to report the death toll as 32.

According to the health ministry, 51 people, mostly children, remain admitted at three hospitals in the capital.

Meanwhile, six victims are currently at the burn institute in critical condition and receiving specialised care. The cases of 13 others have been categorised as severe, while the rest are in stable condition as of yesterday.

Eight patients are now receiving treatment at the intensive care unit, Prof Nasir Uddin, director of the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

### STATE HONOUR

The interim government has decided to confer state honours on two Milestone teachers who died after reportedly saving several students during the incident.

The decision was made at a regular meeting of the advisory council at the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday morning.

Details on the nature and timing of the honours will be announced soon, the council said.

## Thailand, Cambodia clash

FROM PAGE 1

Footage from the scene showed smoke pouring from a convenience store attached to the petrol station. Provincial officials said most of the dead were students inside the shop when the attack happened.

"I heard a loud noise three or four times, and when I looked over, there was a gigantic cloud of smoke," Praphas Intaracheun, a 53-year-old gardener from Sisaket, told AFP.

He was refuelling at another petrol station around 300 metres (984 feet) from the one that was hit.

"I'm scared it might escalate during the night when you can't see anything. I don't even dare sleep," he said.

Thailand said 35 people have been wounded, and accused Cambodia of targeting civilian buildings.

A 30-bed hospital in the town of Phanom Dong Rak in Surin province, just 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the border, was hit by shells which shattered windows and collapsed part of a roof.

The facility, which was also struck in the last major clashes between the

The slain teachers are Maherin Chowdhury and Masuka Begum.

At the start of the meeting, the council adopted a condolence motion mourning the victims. A minute's silence was observed, followed by prayers for the deceased.

The council also decided to assist the families of the dead and injured. The education ministry has been directed to coordinate with the school on next steps.

Special prayers will be observed across all places of worship on Friday, coordinated by the religious affairs ministry.

**MILESTONE'S STATEMENT**  
Also yesterday, Milestone School and College issued a statement saying three students and two guardians remained missing after the crash.

In the statement, Principal Mohammad Ziaul Alam said that between 1:22pm and 1:14pm on Monday, a Bangladesh Air Force fighter jet crashed during routine training.

As classes ended at 1:00pm, only a few students were waiting for their guardians when the crash occurred.

He added that 18 students, two teachers, and two guardians from the school branch died that day. A total of 51 people were seriously injured, including 40 students, seven teachers, one guardian, one female attendant, and one office assistant.

"On Tuesday [July 22], Milestone formed an internal investigation committee. The school will only provide updates on the deceased, injured, or missing from our institution. This process is ongoing," the statement said.

Two of the injured later died after the statement was issued.

Speaking to The Daily Star in the evening, the principal said, "Now that CID has identified the bodies, we have no missing students or staff members at this point."

two countries in 2011, was partially evacuated on Wednesday night as a precaution.

"We got a tip that there would be an attack from Cambodia, a soldier stationed at the entrance told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

"There is no telling when it will be safe enough for patients to return."

### 'MY HOUSE WAS SHAKING'

Fighting was focused on six locations, the Thai army said, with ground troops and tanks battling Cambodian forces for control of territory.

Six Thai air force jets were deployed, hitting two "Cambodian military targets on the ground", according to Thai military deputy spokesperson Ritcha Sukswanon.

Cambodia has not yet commented on casualties on its side. Defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata refused to answer when asked about the issue at a news conference.

AFP journalists met Cambodians fleeing their villages near the Thai border to escape the fighting.