

Mass arrests and block raids fuel fear

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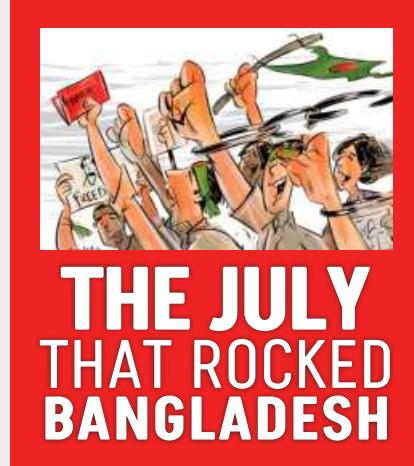
City residents, still reeling from the trauma of deaths and destruction during the quota reform protests, felt a renewed wave of fear. Each day, particularly after sundown, convoys of vehicles carrying law enforcers reached neighbourhoods across Dhaka. Members of different security forces disembarked swiftly, cordoned off streets, and took positions at key points. With their left hands gripping the barrels and right index fingers resting on the triggers, they made their presence felt.

A loud announcement via megaphone reverberated through alleyways and buildings: "Go inside your home. Don't try to come out." Panic stricken residents complied. What followed was a now-familiar routine—block raids. Internet connections at targeted homes were cut, and one by one streetlights went dark. The only illumination came from the searchlights mounted on the law enforcers' vehicles.

Residents from at least nine areas—Mataiul, Shanir Akhra, Jatrabari, Kajla, Bashundhara, Shahinbagh, Mirpur DOHS, ECB Chattar, and Matikata—shared similar accounts. During these raids, police reportedly knocked on doors, entered homes, and detained individuals suspected of involvement in the protests or of having contact with alleged agitators. Joint forces were also deployed outside Dhaka as part of the ongoing nationwide operation.

In the 36 hours leading up to 6:00 pm on July 27, law enforcers arrested at least 726 more people in Dhaka and other districts. In the 10 days prior to July 27, over 8,000 people had been arrested in 553 cases filed across 42 districts. Of them, 5,514 were detained outside the capital.

Two more people who had been injured in recent clashes died on July



JULY 27, 2024

27. Yeamin Chowdhury, a 19-year-old garment worker, succumbed to his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Abdul Majeed, a 20-year-old transport worker, died at Chattogram Medical College Hospital. With their deaths, the official death toll stood at 162 since July 16.

Meanwhile, two more organisers of the quota reform movement—Sarjis Alam and Hasnat Abdullah—were taken into custody by the Detective Branch (DB). On the previous night, three other key organisers—Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud, and Abu Baker Majumder—had also been detained.

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) condemned the arbitrary arrests and demanded the immediate release and protection of all detained students. The forum urged authorities to exercise the highest caution and ensure no student faced harassment.

In a joint letter to Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, 14 foreign missions—including those of the US, UK, France, Germany, Canada, and the EU—called



Women under the banner of "Chhatra Janatar Pashey Nari Samaj" rallied in Purana Paltan on July 27, 2024, condemning arbitrary killings and arrests of students, and demanding the resignation of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

FILE PHOTO

for the protection of human rights and fair trials for those arrested. They expressed deep concern over the casualties and the destruction of public property during the protests.

Adding to international pressure, more than 140 scholars, writers, and public intellectuals from around the world urged the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to press for an independent investigation into the brutal crackdown on students and protesters. In an open letter, they described the attacks as a violation of democratic rights and a mockery of the constitutional right to life.

At noon, women from various backgrounds gathered in Purana Paltan under the banner "Chhatra Janatar Pashey Nari Samaj." They demanded to know under what law the police fired bullets at students and civilians, and called for prime minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation. The protest condemned arbitrary killings, assaults, mass arrests, and the suppression of dissent.

The government extended the daily curfew pause and adjusted office hours for three more days starting from July 28. Offices were to open from 9:00 am.

Then prime minister Sheikh Hasina visited the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), where she blamed the violence on a conspiracy aimed at reducing Bangladesh to a nation of beggars by crippling its economy.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, in a press statement, accused BNP of trying to form a "union of anti-state forces."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, in a statement, accused prime minister Hasina of shedding "crocodile tears" during her hospital visits. He condemned the detention of student leaders from hospitals and warned that such actions would only deepen the crisis. He called for the resignation of the government and accused it of clinging to power through repression, communication shutdowns, and curfews.

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Thailand, Cambodia clash Local pharmas may miss window

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brought Thailand's fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse.

As of yesterday, Thailand said seven soldiers and 13 civilians had been killed in the clashes, while in Cambodia five soldiers and eight civilians had been killed, said Defence Ministry spokesperson Malay Socheata.

In the Thai border province of Sisaket, a university compound has been converted into temporary accommodation, where a volunteer said more than 5,000 people were staying.

Samrong Khamduang said she left her farm, about 10 km from the border, when fighting broke out on Thursday. The 51-year-old's husband stayed behind to look after livestock.

"We got so scared with the sound of artillery," she said. "But my husband stayed back and now we lost the connection. I couldn't call him. I don't know what

is happening back there."

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the chair of the Asean regional bloc, said he would continue to push a ceasefire proposal. Cambodia has backed Anwar's plan, while Thailand has said it agreed with it in principle.

"There is still some exchange of fire," Anwar said, according to state news agency Bernama. He said he had asked his foreign minister "to liaise with the respective foreign ministries and, if possible, will continue engaging with them myself – at least to halt the fighting".

Thailand's ambassador to the United Nations told a Security Council meeting on Friday that soldiers had been injured by newly planted land mines in Thai territory on two occasions since mid-July – claims Cambodia has strongly denied – and said Cambodia had then launched attacks on Thursday morning.

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According to DGDA officials, restructuring both committees became necessary due to leadership changes in various medical associations and institutions following the July mass uprising, as many of their representatives in the committees had affiliations with the AL.

WHY BIOLOGICS ARE CRUCIAL

Many of the biologic medicines, typically expensive in most countries, are being produced locally and sold at prices significantly lower than the global average.

Giving an example, Muktadir said an imported pre-filled syringe of Adalimumab, prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis, once cost Tk 1.65 lakh to Tk 3.6 lakh. Local production has reduced its price to as low as Tk 15,000.

Similarly, a cancer patient can now buy locally

produced Filgrastim – used for boosting immunity – for Tk 7,000-8,000 per pre-filled syringe, while an imported one would cost Tk 85,000-95,000, he mentioned.

Unlike traditional drugs that are generally made from chemical ingredients, biologic medicines are derived from living organisms, including animals, microorganisms such as bacteria and yeast, or other living sources.

Monjurul Alam Monju, CEO of Beacon Medicare, said that once chemical drugs were the cornerstone of treatment, but now biologic medicines are transforming treatment for cancer, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, obesity and high cholesterol, offering more effective and targeted therapies with fewer side effects.

He said Bangladesh faces hurdles in adapting to this shift, as a sluggish

regulatory process delays the introduction of new drugs.

Referring to regulatory complexities, Zahangir Alam, chief financial officer of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said, "We believe the approval process could be more rationalised and better aligned with the needs of the pharmaceutical industry."

Md Morsaline Billah, professor of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering at Khulna University, said Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector has managed to keep prices of biologic medicines 30-40 percent lower than the global average. This affordability has been vital for patients here.

"But this advantage is at risk. With Bangladesh set to graduate from LDC status in 2026, full compliance with TRIPS will be required. Companies will need to pay high royalties or invest

heavily in securing patents – both of which are difficult and costly," he told this newspaper recently.

Local firms could face lawsuits and trade penalties if they produce these drugs without permission from patent holders, said Billah.

He warned that delays in regulatory approvals and outdated patent laws could undermine years of progress. "Drug prices may rise 25-30 percent, pushing essential medicines out of reach for many."

Billah suggested that the government negotiate transitional flexibilities with WTO members and reform the existing patent law.

Stressing the need for public-private partnership for technology transfer, he said, "Inaction is not an option... We must act now to protect access, sustain our industry, and seize global market opportunities."

You can't run

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At the event, the BNP secretary general said reforms cannot be implemented overnight and that they take time. Democratic practices should not be delayed for the sake of reforms, and reforms should not be imposed forcibly.

"We must move swiftly towards a democratic process. Reforms must be made by people's representatives elected through a democratic process."

At another programme, Fakhrul said it is not possible to run the country by hiring a few people from home and abroad.

"Can a country be run by hiring a few people from home and abroad? No, it cannot. This simple fact we need to understand."

Speaking at a discussion titled "July Uprising: Expectation and Achievement" at the Jatiya Press Club, organised by Zia Parishad, the BNP leader said if the government thinks the police will stop taking bribes from tomorrow, it will not happen. "You have to build a system where bribery is discouraged."

Fakhrul also blamed the existing bureaucracy for holding back the country's development.

"Our bureaucracy is a major obstacle to development. It is a negative bureaucracy and must be turned into a positive one. To do that, we mainly

need to involve the people in the process."

Referring to the criticism BNP faces for demanding polls, Fakhrul said, "As soon as we started talking about the election, they began saying BNP only wants polls. But has anyone thought about why we want the election?"

Without polls, he said true public representatives cannot be chosen. "And without representatives, how can they go to parliament? And if there is no elected parliament, how can people's rule be established?"

Regarding the proportional representation (PR) system, the BNP leader said some political parties have started talking about it in different ways. "But this has no connection with Bangladesh. They are loudly calling for elections under the PR system. But what is a proportional election? The ordinary people simply don't understand it."

Fakhrul mentioned that there is currently a kind of confusion in the country regarding the PR system, as some parties are strongly promoting it and speaking in favour of it.

He said the Awami League is a fascist force, and the damage it has done to the country will not be easy to fix. "They have destroyed all the institutions – not only the judiciary, administration, health sector and universities, but also the political parties."

2 more die of burn injuries

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Earlier in the day, Jarif died around 9:15 am in the burn institute's Intensive Care Unit (ICU), said Shawon Bin Rahman, residential surgeon of the burn institute.

"He had suffered 40 percent burns," he said.

Shortly after, around 10:15 am, Masuma succumbed to her injuries.

"She had burns over 90 percent of her body, including damage to her respiratory tract. She was on life support," Shawon added.

Jarif's father, Habibur Rahman, said Jarif was the younger of two siblings. His family is from Rajbari but currently resides in Uttara's Sector 12.

Masuma's husband, Md Selim, said his wife had worked at the school for several years. The family, originally from Bhola, lived in the Shukrapur area of Turag's Nayanagar with their son and daughter.

Meanwhile, academic activities at Milestone School and College's main and Diabari campuses will remain suspended till Monday, as the authority has extended the extra leave for two more days.

The Chinese Embassy in Dhaka said, "The doctors and nurses offered advice to the Bangladeshi doctors about preventing wound infection and the methods of routine care for the injured, checked the patients' conditions, offered assistance on cleaning the wounds and changing the dressings, assisted in arterial punctures, and provided guidance for the surgery."

Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen yesterday visited the burn institute and handed over medicines to the hospital authority, said the health ministry.

Apart from India and China, a medical team from Singapore is also working with the hospital.

Yunus visits burn institute to inquire about injured

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nearby hospitals where swift preliminary care was administered. Most were then transferred to the burn institute and Combined Military Hospital.

He noted that the ministry had immediately alerted the burn institute to prepare, enabling doctors, nurses, and emergency teams to treat nearly 30 patients upon arrival.

Confusion over casualty numbers arose initially due to swift transfers across more than 10 medical facilities. Several victims required DNA profiling for identification, delaying the final figures.

Refined also briefed on a critical gap in ambulance availability, exposing limitations within the country's emergency health infrastructure.

In response, Yunus instructed that specific recommendations be submitted promptly to improve readiness. He assured that these would be addressed with urgency.

Govt aide pushes 5G project amid graft probe

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Asked, Taiyeb said, "We didn't give any instruction or directive to the ACC. Since Tk 290 crore had already been spent during the past government's tenure through an irrevocable LC [letter of credit], and given the low possibility of recovering the funds through a legal battle with a Chinese tech giant, we are trying to move forward with the project."

He further said it was necessary to act, as another BTCL project, linked to the procurement of 5G equipment, has become non-functional due to the delay. Moreover, the US dollar appreciated by 40 percent against the taka.

"ACC verbally requested written communication. Based on that, we sent a letter stating that the funds had already been spent and that the corruption allegations originated during the previous administration.

"We urged the ACC to investigate and take appropriate action against those involved in graft during that period. We also requested delivery of the equipment for which payment had already been made," Taiyeb said in a voice message to The Daily Star.

He also said the ongoing probe into the allegations against a former secretary

and the then minister – particularly their attempts to influence the tender process – must continue under the legal framework.

"Our initiative is aimed at saving a state-owned company and ensuring that the funds disbursed from its accounts are effectively utilised. There is no other motive behind this."

Approved by ECNEC in February 2022, the Tk 1,059-crore project aims to prepare the country for a 5G rollout. Of the total budget, Tk 463 crore was allocated for buying equipment. In November 2023, Chinese telecom giant Huawei was awarded the controversial tender as the lowest bidder at Tk 326 crore.

The original controversy was that the project's technical evaluation committee declared all bidders as qualified, even though none met the full technical specifications required by the tender.

According to the public procurement rules, any bid that is not fully compliant must be rejected before financial offers are considered.

Bidders, as The Daily Star previously reported on December 3, 2023, were given less than 48 hours' notice before financial offers were opened, a deviation from the standard seven-day notice period

required by the tender's "Instructions to Tenderers". This prevented at least one bidder from having its authorised representative present.

And the notification of award was issued to Huawei with unusual speed amid allegations of interference from high-level officials at the Posts and Telecommunications Division.

Following the Awami League government's fall, ACC launched a probe into alleged irregularities and found primary evidence of violations of public procurement law.

In a letter dated June 18, the ACC conveyed its concerns to the telecom ministry and Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL).

The ACC investigation team has already found preliminary evidence of violations/breaches of Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2006 and Public Procurement Rules (PPR) 2008 in the procurement process under discussion," said the letter signed by the then ACC secretary Khorshedha Yasmeen.

"Under such circumstances, proceeding with the remaining procurement activities may constitute a legal violation, and the related expenditure is likely to be deemed

unlawful," it read.

Despite the ACC's objections, Taiyeb, who holds the rank of state minister, sought the commission's cooperation to allow the project to proceed. He had earlier visited the ACC office on April 13.

In the June 22 letter to the ACC chief, Taiyeb said it was not possible to conduct the Factory Pre-Acceptance Test (FPAT) – a mandatory step to ensure that the procured devices meet technical specifications before shipment – as the Chief Adviser's Office issued a circular on March 23, prohibiting foreign visits funded by suppliers or contractors.

However, the circular in question was a continuation of a previous one dated December 9, 2024, which said relevant technical experts may travel abroad for procurement purposes, including FPAT and pre-shipment inspections.