

# Crackdown worsens, thousands accused

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

By July 28, more than 2.13 lakh people—most of them unnamed—had been accused in nearly 200 cases filed with police stations across the capital in connection with the recent violence centring the quota reform movement.

Almost all the cases were filed by the police themselves. Records showed that in at least 16 of those cases, between 5,000 and 10,000 individuals had been accused. Over the preceding 12 days, law enforcement agencies arrested more than 2,500 people, including political leaders, activists, and students, from various parts of Dhaka, according to court documents.

However, the actual numbers of arrests and cases were likely much higher, with police continuing raids across different neighbourhoods of the capital.

The country had witnessed violence on an unprecedented scale in the week prior. What began as peaceful demonstrations turned deadly on July 15, when members of the Chhatra League attacked protesting students on several university campuses. In the days that followed, the violence escalated across Dhaka and beyond, resulting in the deaths of at least 162 individuals.

Amid these developments, six organisers of the quota reform movement—held in custody by the Detective Branch (DB) of police—announced the withdrawal of their protest programmes. The announcement was made via a video message circulated to media outlets from the DB office on Minto Road in the capital.

Nahid Islam, one of the key organisers, appeared in the video alongside five other coordinators. However, the statement drew immediate rejection from another coordinator, Abdul Kader, who accused the DB of coercion.

Speaking through WhatsApp, Kader strongly condemned the “scripted statement” and claimed it had been made “at gunpoint at the DB office.” He declared that protest rallies would be held across the country the following day and reaffirmed the movement’s commitment to its demands.

Meanwhile, a seventh organiser was also allegedly picked up by DB officers. According to his younger sister, Umme Khair Hridi, around 4:00am, eight to

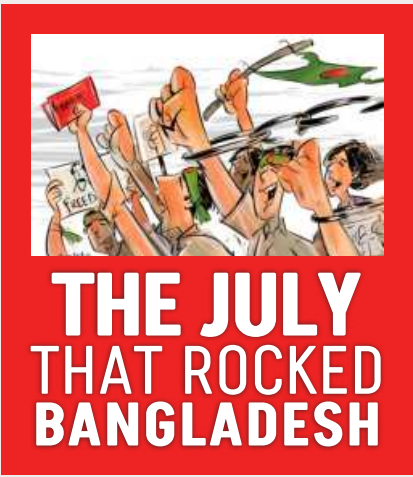
ten men in plain clothes—identifying themselves as DB officials—detained Arif Sohel, a student of international relations at Jahangirnagar University, from his home near the campus.

Then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina vowed to bring those responsible for the recent violence to justice. While distributing financial assistance to the families of 34 victims at Gono Bhaban—including Abu Sayeed, a student of Rangpur’s Begum Rokeya University—she said, “My effort will be to find those involved in these murders. They must be punished.”

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan provided the first official death toll during a press briefing at the Secretariat, stating that at least 147 people had lost



**Jhunu Begum, 65, wails outside a Narayanganj court after her grandson Arif Hossain, 19, was taken away in a prison van. She pleaded that he was innocent and not involved in politics.**



JULY 28, 2024

their lives in the violence related to the quota reform protests. The victims, he said, included students, professionals, law enforcement officers, and Awami League leaders and activists.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) assured the international community that those responsible for the violence would be brought to justice based on evidence. It emphasised that no reprisal or harassment would be tolerated against protesting students or innocent civilians. Law enforcement agencies, it said, had been given clear instructions in this regard.

Meanwhile, mobile internet was partially restored after more than ten days. However, major social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube remained inaccessible.

## MILESTONE JET CRASH

# Health ministry revises death toll down to 33

### 4 critically injured receiving treatment at burn institute ICU; 2 more released

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health ministry revised down the Milestone jet crash death toll twice in six and a half hours yesterday, putting the number at 33 – two less than the previous day’s count.

Four critically injured survivors were being treated at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, which released two other people injured in the crash yesterday, bringing the total number of discharged patients in the incident to four.

The latest discharged patients are Kazi Amzad Said, 20, and Sabuja Begum, 40, the institute’s Director Prof Dr Nasir Uddin said at a press briefing around 3:00pm.

Amzad was injured while trying to rescue others during the crash, while Sabuja Begum worked as a caregiver (Aya) at the school.

**TOLL REVISION**

The ministry revised the death count at 10:17am for the first time. Through its public relation officer, the ministry gave a second revised number at 4:50pm.

In the first revision announced on Facebook, the ministry said the update followed a correction from the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

According to the CMH, its morgue received 15 body bags on July 21, the day of the crash. Turag police conducted inquest on 11 full bodies, two partial bodies, and body parts from five others, the statement said.

Of the 11 complete bodies, nine were identified. Eight of them were handed over to their families on July 21, and the remaining one the following day.

On July 22, a forensic team from police’s Criminal Investigation Department (CID) collected DNA samples from the two unidentified full bodies, two partial bodies, and body parts of five others. Based on DNA analysis, five additional individuals

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

# Parties agree to cap PM’s term at 10yrs

FROM PAGE 1

accountability, and public service orientation within the force.

In the proposal presented in the morning session, the consensus commission said the police commission will be led by a chairperson, who must be a retired judge of the Appellate Division and not over 75 years old. The member secretary will be a retired police officer, not older than 62 and who had served at least at the additional inspector general rank.

In addition to these two, the commission will have seven other members, one representative of the leader of the house, one representative of the leader of the opposition in parliament, one representative of the Speaker, and one representative of the deputy Speaker (from the opposition).

Other members will include a retired government official who had served as a secretary or ranks above, a retired judge who served at least as a district judge, and a human rights activist with a minimum of 10 years of experience in a registered human rights organisation, either domestic or international. At least two of the commission members must be women.

Key objectives of the police commission will be to ensure that the police can carry out its duties competently and within the bounds of the law.

The commission will also serve as a mechanism to resolve complaints raised by police members themselves as well as those filed by citizens against police personnel.

**BASIC PRINCIPLES**

The four parties that opposed the proposal on basic principles of the state are the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Basad), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist), and Bangladesh Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Bangladesh Jasad).

In the proposal, the consensus commission said that regardless of which fundamental principles remain

in the constitution, “equality, human dignity, social justice, democracy, and religious freedom and harmony” must be included as core constitutional principles.

In its counter-proposal, CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince suggested that “equality, human dignity, social justice, and religious freedom and harmony” could be added to the four principles in the 1972 constitution: nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism.

During the discussion, BASAD General Secretary Bazlur Rashid Firoz and BASAD (Marxist) leader Masud Rana voiced their support for the CPB’s stance.

They asserted that they would not accept any form of consensus, even one accompanied by a note of dissent, and warned they would withdraw from the process if any decisions were made regarding the basic principles.

Firoz reminded Prof Riaz that he had defined “consensus” as “an agreement that must include all parties.”

Speaking to reporters during the lunch break, Prince said, “It’s not possible to achieve national consensus on the fundamental principles of the constitution through this process, as participants represent diverse ideological backgrounds. The matter must be placed before the people. Political parties should declare their positions publicly, and the people should decide.”

Prince further warned that manipulating or altering the constitution’s core principles by dint of majority would constitute a betrayal of its Liberation War roots.

“If this continues, our regular participation in the commission’s dialogue will be at risk,” he said, warning that such moves could derail the entire consensus-building effort.

Several political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, NCP, and Khelafat Majslh expressed support for the commission’s proposal.

On state principles, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin

Ahmed said his party disagrees with the current version adopted through the 15th amendment to the constitutions and prefers the earlier one under the 5th amendment, but has no objection to adding “equality, human dignity, social justice, and religious harmony” as proposed.

Jamaat wants to restore “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah” as a core principle of the constitution, said party Assistant Secretary General Maulana Rafiqul Islam Khan.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Chairman Shahadat Hossain Selim said, “Most political parties agree that a return to the 1972 constitution is not practical, as socialism has become globally outdated.”

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen also welcomed the proposal, saying, “We support the commission’s draft and do not wish to revisit past ideological debates.”

On June 25, the consensus commission placed new proposals regarding basic principles of the constitution. The Constitution Reform Commission had previously proposed “equality, human dignity, social justice, democracy, and pluralism” as the basic principles of the constitution.

Due to the division among the parties, the revised version has now replaced “pluralism” with “religious freedom and communal harmony.”

The BNP, Jamaat, and several other Islamist parties were against “pluralism” as a basic principle.

**WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION**

No consensus was reached on the final topic of the day: women’s representation in parliament.

The commission proposed maintaining the existing 50 reserved seats for women and requested political parties to nominate women candidates in at least one-fourth or one-fifth of the 300 general seats.

The BNP proposed that parties nominate women in at least 5 percent of the 300 general seats in the next election, and gradually raise it to 10 percent.

“This would ensure 80 seats for women when combined with the existing 50 reserved seats. This can begin as a gentleman’s agreement and be formalised later through constitutional amendment,” Salauddin said.

Rafiqul said Jamaat supports a 400-seat parliament with 300 general and 100 women’s seats, with women’s representation determined proportionally based on party votes under a proportional representation (PR) system.

On July 14, the commission proposed abolishment of the current system of reserving seats for women. It recommended that parties contesting for at least 25 constituencies nominate women in one-third of these seats under the first-past-the-post system, where the highest vote-getter wins.

This issue has been discussed repeatedly during the reform talks, but parties remained divided.

Initially, the commission had proposed increasing the number of reserved seats for women from 50 to 100 and suggested direct elections to these seats.

In his opening speech yesterday, Prof Riaz said a preliminary draft of the National Charter will be sent to political parties tomorrow and it would not be discussed during the dialogue unless there were significant objections.

“If there are fundamental disagreements, we will bring it into the discussion. Otherwise, we will not. Any feedback from your side will be incorporated. The preliminary charter will include background, context, and areas of commitment,” he added.

He also informed that a specific day would be allocated in the dialogue to officially sign the National Charter.

The commission aims to conclude the dialogue by July 31.

So far, consensus has been reached on 12 issues. Discussions on seven remain incomplete, while three topics have not been talked about yet, Riaz said.

However, following a wave of state-organised violence in late 2012, the Myanmar authorities confined many Rohingyas to “open-air prisons”, denying them access to university or completion of education. They were permitted to study only at understaffed and under-resourced schools.

As a consequence, there is a high level of illiteracy among the Rohingyas, with about 73 percent self-identifying as illiterate, the report said.

Nay San Lwin, co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, said the 47 Rohingya students who had been admitted to Yangon University were barred from continuing their education after the 2021 military coup.

“In reality, no Rohingya students are currently allowed to study at the university... Without good education, they risk becoming a lost generation,” he added.

# Education at Rohingya camps in disarray

FROM PAGE 1

year, but less than \$10 million has been received. The total budget requirement is \$934 million for around 1.5 million people – 1.2 million Rohingyas and 300,000 members of the host community. Of the amount, \$303 million (32 percent) was secured as of July 12.

The funding shortfall stems largely from a drastic reduction in humanitarian aid by the US, which provided over half of the total funding for Rohingyas over the last few years.

Ehsan Ullah, a Rohingya teacher at Kutupalong refugee camp, said that though classes for kindergarten to class-4 remain suspended, students in class 5 to 7 receive lessons four days a month and those in class 8 to 10 five days a week.

He pointed out that the majority of children are enrolled in grades below class-6.

The teachers have called for the reinstatement of their dismissed

colleagues, proposing that the authorities reduce lesson hours instead of suspending classes.

“UNICEF will decide on the teachers’ proposal within a month. We will have to wait until August for the decision,” Cox’s Bazar Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Salahuddin said, referring to a stakeholders’ meeting at his office on July 3.

Expressing frustration at the suspension of classes, Rohingya leaders said many of their children are being robbed of their dreams.

Saiful, a community leader who preferred to use only one name, said the community has endured decades of persecution in Myanmar that denied them citizenship, leaving many without hope.

“Some of us still seek to build the capacity to support and lead the community, but that dream now seems increasingly out of reach,” he said.

Humanitarian agencies set up the learning centres at the camps following the 2017 Rohingya influx into Bangladesh. The camps also host around 1,000 madrasas and about 200 community-based schools that remain operational.

At the learning centres, students are taught English, and other subjects, including mathematics and science, in the Burmese language. Bangladesh government allowed the centres to introduce the Myanmar school curriculum in 2020.

According to a 2018 report by the Burmese Rohingya Organization UK (BROUK), many Rohingyas in Rakhine state were either denied access to education or received poor-quality schooling.

Prior to the 2012 violence in Rakhine, they could attend government schools with their Rakhine peers and were also eligible to receive higher education at the region’s main university in Sittwe.