

Crackdown on March for Justice

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As the sun rose on July 31, 2024, thousands of students, teachers, and citizens across Bangladesh prepared to join the March for Justice, a countrywide programme organised by Students Against Discrimination.

Intended to honour those killed or arrested during the quota reform protests, the day soon became another chapter of repression and resistance, with clashes, detentions, and violence unfolding across cities.

The peaceful rallies were disrupted as law enforcers used teargas, stun grenades, and batons. At least 100 people were injured and 83 detained.

In Barishal, police charged at students on Kathpatti Road, injuring 11, including five journalists. A confrontation broke out inside Barishal City Corporation between protesters and City Panel Mayor-2 Enamul Haque Bahar. Thirteen protesters were detained; most were later released.

In Sylhet, around 100 Shahjalal University of Science and Technology students marched towards Subid Bazar. When they tried to cross police barricades around 1:00pm, teargas and stun grenades were fired. Locals said around 50 were injured. Another 100 cultural and political activists also marched through the city.

Khulna saw intense clashes as students marched from Nirala Mor to Royal Mor, dismantled barricades at Moyla Pota, and gathered at Satrasta. Police detained at least 19 people.

In Dinajpur, 10 were detained, including five female students, during rallies at Gore-Shaheed Boromath and the Shaheed Minar.

In Dhaka, private university students and teachers were intercepted near the High Court. At least five students were picked up; one was later released. Two Dhaka University professors – Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury and Shehreen Amin Monami – were shoved by police



THE JULY THAT ROCKED BANGLADESH

JULY 31, 2024

while trying to stop a student's arrest. The University Teachers' Network condemned the "misbehaviour" and demanded an investigation.

A group of pro-BNP DU teachers, joined by students from BUET, DU, and private universities, attempted to march to the High Court but were stopped near Shishu Academy. They held a sit-in at Doyel Chattar. Over 50 lawyers gathered near the closed Mazar Gate of the High Court, chanting in solidarity.

In Chattogram, students protested on court premises, joined by pro-BNP lawyers. A confrontation followed with pro-AL lawyers.

At Jahangirnagar University, students and teachers held a signature campaign demanding the release of detainees.

The then prime minister Sheikh Hasina said damaged buildings could be rebuilt but lives lost could not be returned. She claimed her government had fulfilled the student demands and that the Appellate Division had upheld the 2018 notification abolishing quotas.

At a protest organised by ULAB



Professor Salimullah Khan spoke during a protest organised by ULAB teachers in Dhaka on July 31, 2024, demanding justice for the students who were killed, arrested, and disappeared during the quota reform movement.

FILE PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

teachers, Prof Salimullah Khan called the killings state-sponsored and demanded an international probe. Wearing red, teachers expressed solidarity with the "killed, injured, disappeared, and persecuted" and called for the withdrawal of all cases.

Salimullah said the issue was political and criticised the government for choosing repression over dialogue. He said an apology and resignation were needed for a fresh start.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir called the government a "public enemy" and accused it of genocide. He urged citizens to join the protests and called for international accountability.

That day, a Supreme Court lawyer filed a petition seeking a judicial commission to investigate the deaths of four children during the protests.

The government lifted restrictions on Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp after a meeting with Meta, ByteDance, and YouTube representatives.

Still, the crackdown continued. Law enforcers arrested 281 more

people in the 36 hours before 6:00pm on July 31 – 205 in 31 districts, the rest in Dhaka. Of the 76 produced in court, most were jailed, some placed on remand.

This brought total arrests since July 18 to at least 10,769 across 673 cases filed in Dhaka and 51 districts.

Two US senators and two UK MPs urged Bangladeshi authorities to conduct an independent probe into the alleged rights violations.

That night, protest organisers announced Remembering the Heroes, a series of programmes to honour the fallen – silent processions, protest songs, wall writings, and campaigns under hashtags like #JulyMassacre and #RememberingOurHeroes. They reiterated their nine-point demand, including the resignation of seven cabinet members and an apology from Hasina.

What began as remembrance became yet another day of trauma. But in the chants, marches, and graffiti, the students held their ground – mourning, resisting and refusing to forget.

FIRST ROUND OF CONSENSUS TALKS 62 proposals finalised for July Charter

Parties to send final revisions today, says Prof Ali Riaz

MD ABBAS

During the first round of talks between the National Consensus Commission and political parties, consensus was reached on 62 out of 166 proposals submitted by six commissions.

Based on these agreed proposals related to the constitutional, electoral system, judiciary, public administration, police, and anti-corruption reform commissions, the consensus commission sent a draft of the issues to be included in the final July Charter to the political parties, Prof Ali Riaz, commission vice-president, told The Daily Star.

"We expect to receive any final additions or revisions by tomorrow [today] from the political parties," he added.

Thirty parties have agreed on the proposal of forming a legislative body under the Constitutional Reform Commission, 24 supported defining qualifications and disqualifications of upper house members, 19 backed provisions on reserved seats for women in parliament, and 29 appointing a deputy speaker from the opposition.

Besides, 24 parties agreed on legislation concerning parliamentary committees and members, 28 supported the impeachment process of the president, 30 Bangla as the state language, 31 on the identity of Bangladeshi citizens, and 28 on defining crimes like abolishing or suspending the constitution.

Thirty-three parties agreed on dignity and coexistence among all communities, 31 supported expanding fundamental rights, and 23 backed parliamentary approval of international treaties.

On local governance, 28 parties backed holding elections, 27 financial reforms, 27 placing government officials under local authority, 24 supported revenue-raising powers, 25 district coordination councils, and 23 transitional provisions. Twenty-four parties agreed to bring political parties under the Right to Information Act.

Regarding the judicial reforms, 30 parties backed increasing the number of Appellate Division judges, 26 agreed on judicial appointments, 29 on the Judicial Appointment Commission, 32 on judicial independence, 31 on the judicial code of conduct, and 21 on the code for retired judges.

Thirty-one parties supported Supreme Court administrative independence, 29 a permanent attorney service, 30 agreed on an independent criminal investigation service, 32 on increasing judiciary manpower, 30 on converting legal aid services to a directorate, and 28 on asset disclosure for court officials.

Riyad-led group targeted another former AL MP

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station yourself, or should we take you?"

Azad said as he had no money with him, the attackers searched his drawers, found a cheque book, and coerced him into writing the cheques.

"They said I was an aide of Sheikh Hasina, so I had to pay."

Azad was elected a member of parliament in 2009 through a by-election after then prime minister Sheikh Hasina vacated the Rangpur 6 seat.

Earlier yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (Media) Talebur Rahman said they recovered four cheques worth Tk 2.25 crore from Riyad's house. According to police sources, the cheques were signed by Azad.

Police said Riyad and his associates could not cash the cheques due to insufficient funds. Since then, the group had been pressuring Azad to deposit money into the account.

The process of filing a case was underway till the filing of this report at 8:00pm.

On July 26, Riyad, Ibrahim Hossain Munna, 24, Dhaka city unit convener of Student Against Discrimination; SAD members Sakadoun Siam, 22, and Sadab, 21; and a 16-year-old were arrested from the house of former MP Shammi Ahmed in Dhaka's Gulshan area, after allegedly trying to extort her family.

They are currently on remand and have been expelled from their respective organisations.

In the case filed with Gulshan Police Station, Shammi's husband, Siddique Abu Zafar, alleged that the group, identifying themselves as members of SAD, first visited their home on July 17 and demanded Tk 50 lakh in cash.

As the former MP was not home at the time, the demand was made to her husband.

"When I refused to pay, they labelled me an Awami League associate and kept pressuring me. Eventually, I gave Tk 10 lakh to Abdur Razzak Riyad," Zafar said.

He said the group returned again on July 19, banged on the door, but left when he called police.

"On July 26, Riyad and others came again. Though I was not there, the security guard informed me. They demanded the remaining Tk 40 lakh and threatened to hand me over to police if I didn't comply."

He added, "I called the police again, and five of them were arrested from the spot, while another accused, Kazi Gourab, managed to flee."

Gulshan Police Station Officer-in-Charge Hafizur Rahman said police are investigating whether the group had extorted others as well.

Deal reached on women's JS seats

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They also consented to retaining the existing 50 reserved seats for women, with necessary constitutional amendments to follow.

"Almost all parties agreed in principle to gradually raise the number of women's seats to 100," Riaz said, adding that while some parties submitted notes of dissent, "a broad consensus has been established."

He said following the charter's signing, political parties would be urged to nominate at least 5 percent female candidates in the next polls. The constitution will also require 10 percent female nominations in the following election, with the quota increasing by 5 percentage points in each subsequent one until 33 percent representation is achieved. The reserved seat provision would remain until 2043 or be repealed earlier if the 33 percent target is met.

Riaz added that a concept paper on expanding the president's powers had been shared with parties.

The proposed expansion includes appointments to the posts of attorney general; heads and members of commissions such as the NHRC, Information Commission, Press Council, Bangladesh Bank, UGC, and the energy and telecom regulators; chiefs of the armed forces; and heads of DGFI and NSI.

"These proposals have been sent to the parties for consideration," said Riaz. "If consensus is reached, constitutional amendments will follow."

Members of the commission also met Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, who chairs the commission, to brief him on progress and disagreements.

"Our goal today is to reach full consensus on the July Charter," said Riaz. "We've already agreed on 14 major issues, including women's representation. Parties were asked to submit written amendments."

He said the commission has been tasked with resolving decisions on the caretaker government system and the upper house structure. The commission will clarify its position on the matter today, he said.

Landlord killed inside BNP office

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investigation," the OC added.

Dr Ashraful Amin, resident medical officer at the health complex, said, "The man was brought dead to the hospital. We found a deep cut on his head. It could have been caused by a sharp object. When the body was brought in, they claimed he had been in a road accident. We suspected foul play and informed police."

Jahangir's son Rasel told The Daily Star that after the AL government's fall last August, local BNP men, led by Tota Mia Pradhan, former general secretary of the Mahmudpur Union unit of BNP, merged three shops at the bazar to set up a party office.

A banner reading "BNP Office - Ward 7, Mahmudpur Union" was put up in front of the tin-shed structure.

"Without informing us, they set up the party office. Two of the shops belong to my uncles, and they received rent, but we got nothing. Despite several

A preliminary draft of the charter has already been shared with

parties. "We expect to receive any final additions or revisions by tomorrow (today)," said Riaz.

Apart from women's representation, the agenda covered proposals on the president's role, presidential election procedures, upper house structure and membership, expansion of fundamental rights, and principles of state policy.

Riaz said discussions on presidential powers would be deferred, as the proposal was newly introduced.

"We want to reach unanimous decisions on all other matters and your cooperation is essential in doing so, just as you have supported us since the beginning. We will continue our efforts in that spirit," he added.

The commission's proposal submitted earlier during yesterday's talks called for nominating women in 5 to 7 percent of general seats in the upcoming polls while retaining the 50 reserved seats.

In the following election, the quota would rise to 15 percent, increasing incrementally until 100 women are directly elected to parliament by the 15th parliamentary election.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed proposed starting with 5 percent, stating that his party would struggle to field so many female candidates. He suggested raising the number to 15 percent starting from the 14th parliament.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen opposed the commission's proposal and reiterated support for direct elections to 100 women's seats.

Jamaat-e-Islami Naye-b-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher opposed BNP's stance and suggested exploring other ways to increase reserved seats "in a way that honours the spirit of inclusion."

In response, Riaz said the final decision would follow Prof Yunus's guidance.

Tania Rab of JSD (Rab) and Mominul Amin of NDM recommended easing the binding quota to allow parties

meetings, they refused to pay us. Today, when my father went to ask for due rent, they beat him inside the office," Rasel alleged.

However, Tota Mia's son Khokon Pradhan denied Jahanghir was beaten.

"He [Jahangir] tore down our party banner today. As other party leaders including my father were present, there was scuffle. My father slapped him, and Jahangir struck back. At one stage, Jahangir suddenly fell sick."

Identifying himself as a BNP activist, Khokon added, "We had already decided to vacate Jahangir's shop... He was not beaten; he collapsed and died during the scuffle due to a sudden health issue."

Despite Khokon's claims, locals said Jahangir was assaulted with sticks by several BNP leaders.

Yusuf Ali Bhuiyan, Araihaazar upazila BNP president, said he came to know about the new party office and the whole issue after visiting the victim's family yesterday.

"The incident is absolutely shameful,"

flexibility in fielding 5-7 percent female candidates.

CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince advocated for direct elections to the 100 women's seats, while IAB's Ashraf Ali Akon supported a proportional representation system.

DRAFT CHARTER

BNP's Salahuddin told reporters that the charter would ultimately be implemented through the next parliament.

"The charter is a social contract among the nation, its people, political parties, and stakeholders. I believe the only legitimate space for its implementation is the national parliament," he said.

"Once the charter is finalised and made available, will any political party dare to reject it? And if they do, where will their political credibility stand?"

During a tea break, Jamaat leader Taher remarked, "A legal framework must be built for the charter. Otherwise, these discussions will bear no fruit."

Jamaat representative Advocate Shishir Monir proposed several legal options, including a Legal Framework Order (LFO), a pre-election referendum, or an ordinance issued by the chief adviser. He cited examples from the Zia and Ershad regimes where referendums and proclamations were later ratified by parliament and given constitutional status.

NCP's Akhter strongly objected to the current draft's two-year implementation timeline.

"We categorically reject such a delay. A charter that takes years to implement only opens the door to deception and betrayal of the people's expectations," he said. "We do not want another ineffective, incomplete, and toothless document like past three-party frameworks."

The NCP has demanded that the charter incorporate reforms agreed upon by all parties, carry legal enforceability, and provide a mechanism for immediate implementation.

"We are not willing to sign any document that does not meet these criteria," Akhter warned.

he added.

Last night, BNP's Narayanganj unit expelled Tota Mia Pradhan; Khokon Pradhan, former associate general secretary of Narayanganj Chhtra Dal; Rasel Pradhan; Alam Mia; and Saddam Hossain, from the party for their alleged involvement in the killing.

Mahmudpur union BNP president Masum Shikari said, "Our BNP office is located at the entrance of the market. Another office was opened in front of Tota Pradhan's house. He is a supporter of Mahmudur Rahman Suman. Suman and his associates regularly visited that office."

Suman is the assistant economic affairs secretary of the BNP's central committee.

Talking to local BNP leaders, it emerged that there are four factions of BNP operating in Araihaazar.

The body has been sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for an autopsy. A murder case is being filed, police confirmed.

The hospital that did not

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But in a quiet corner of North Jatrabari, across the police station and beside a Jubo League office, a different story unfolded.

Ten beds. Twenty-eight staff. One hospital – Safa Marwa Hospital and Diagnostic Centre.

Founded four years ago by 15 friends, it runs on a Tk 2 lakh monthly rent, occupying the first three floors, and half of the fourth and fifth floors the building.

In the heart of Jatrabari – one of the uprising's fiercest flashpoints – Safa Marwa became a rare sanctuary.

Protests in the area began on July 15, aiming to block the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway. But after the police shot dead Rangpur's student protester Abu Sayed on July 16, the protests intensified across the country and Jatrabari was no exception.

Then from July 19 to August 6, with gunshots, stun grenades, and tear gas on one side, and protesters' chants and clashes on the other, Safa Marwa stood firm with its doors wide open.

Protesters and locals with bullet, pellet, or baton injuries poured in and received the same care, regardless of ability to pay.

Mohammad Sohrab Hossain, one of the owners of the hospital and its manager, recalled treating over 500 people. "We used money from our own hospital funds to ensure we had enough supplies for everyone."

"Many times, we couldn't even go home. After July 19, I wasn't able to return to my house in Nakhla para for five days. I had to borrow money just to manage.... From early August, we ran the place non-stop for six days. All of us were exhausted."

At one point, eight beds were set up on the ground floor to speed up treatment. After bandaging, stitching, and stabilising patients, staff referred many to Dhaka Medical College Hospital or other facilities, even arranging transport when needed.

Robiul Islam, another staffer, said they treated 50-60 patients daily on those beds. "Doctors and nurses stitched wounds, gave painkillers, set up IVs – all amid sounds of pain and despair."

At night, they slept on upper floors, with makeshift arrangements for food and supplies to keep the hospital running.

Sohrab admitted that like any private hospital, their usual goal is profit. "But during those days, we set everything aside for the sake of humanity. We spent lakhs from our own pockets on medicine, bandages, needles, and more."

"Most patients were protesting students and locals. Many said they'd return to pay their dues, but no one did. Still, we didn't take that to heart. And we haven't stopped providing services."

He said they never refused treatment. "We helped anyone who

came. The police asked us to send medical teams too, and we did." Those who brought in the injured were also offered water and basic care.

Al Amin, a protester and owner of a general store next to the hospital, said he's run his business there for 11 years. "The hospital remained open throughout the protests, and I saw many wounded being treated here."

However, the upper floor of his shop used to be a Jubo League office and so, the hospital came under threat several times. "Protesters tried to set fire to the Jubo League office, but they didn't go through with it. They didn't want to risk damaging the hospital that was helping them."

On August 4, as demonstrators hurled stones at the Jubo League office from the Jatrabari floyer, the hospital did end up suffering some collateral damage as glass windows and doors on the second and third floors were shattered. Staff pulled the shutters down – but left a gap wide enough so the injured could still be brought in.

The next day, August 5, was the bloodiest – at least 52 were killed and countless more injured in police shootings in the area, according to a recent BBC report. The Jatrabari Police Station itself was set ablaze, reportedly killing around 10 officers. Gunfire, screams, and chaos engulfed the area. Still, hospital workers carried on with one aim: saving as many lives as possible.

Sohrab said, "Many of the injured were just 15 or 16. I saw my own sons in their faces. I kept thinking, 'These boys could've been mine.' That thought kept me going."

Robiul recalled a moment he still can't forget.

"Around 2:15pm, a man in his early 30s stumbled in, soaked in blood. He wore only jeans and sneakers – he'd been hit with pellets at close range and hadn't eaten in three days. First, we gave him water. He drank almost eight glasses."

"While we were treating him, the TV showed a news scroll: 'Sheikh Hasina has fled Bangladesh by helicopter.' Hearing this, he begged to use my phone, called someone and said, 'Bou [wife], Sheikh Hasina's fled!'"

He then asked which way was west (pashchim), and fell into sijdah, praying. "After a long time, he sprang up, overjoyed, as if the pellets didn't hurt him anymore. Once we were done treating him, I gave him a shirt to wear, and he left after thanking us profusely."

Ayahs, cleaners – everyone pitched in. All hands were on deck throughout those days, Sohrab said.

To this day, he says their greatest success wasn't financial. "It was moral. We kept going. Some thanked us. Others never came back. That didn't matter. We did our duty and we're proud of ourselves."