

Jamaat banned, protests surge, death toll mounts

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The day marked a turning point in Bangladesh's deepening political crisis, as the government officially banned Jamaat-e-Islami and all its affiliated organisations, including Islami Chhatra Shibir. The decision, formalised through a home ministry gazette notification, came amid escalating public unrest, growing demands for justice over student killings, and continued mass demonstrations across the country.

In a separate development, then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told the media that both the United Nations and any interested country were welcome to send experts to Bangladesh to investigate recent incidents of violence. "I want all incidents to be investigated because it should be found out what was behind those incidents and how those happened," she said.

It may be noted that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk had earlier offered to deploy an independent fact-finding team to help restore public trust and de-escalate tensions. "In these challenging times, my office is ready to support your efforts in resolving the current crisis," he wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister dated July 23.

Meanwhile, six coordinators of the quota reform movement who had been in Detective Branch custody were released around 1:30pm. Badrul Islam, father of one of the organisers, Nahid Islam, confirmed their release to this newspaper.

On campuses across the country, teachers and students staged demonstrations under the



THE JULY THAT ROCKED BANGLADESH

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"Remembering Our Heroes" campaign. At least five public universities saw teachers organising human chains, silent marches, and rallies demanding justice for the victims of state violence and an end to the harassment of both students and faculty.

At Rajshahi University, teachers intervened to prevent the detention of students during a protest. However, in Barishal University, police detained 12 students during a demonstration. In the capital, the Bangladesh University Teachers' Network held a rally near the Raju Sculpture, demanding the immediate release of arrested students, the withdrawal of law enforcement from campuses, and the reopening of educational institutions.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir issued a strong statement accusing the government and pro-



PHOTO: FILE/RASHED SHUMON

University teachers under the banner of "Teachers Against Repression" held a rally at the base of the Raju Bhaskarja on August 1, 2024, demanding the immediate release of students detained during block raids, justice for those killed, and an end to the ongoing harassment of students and educators.

ruling party officials in law enforcement agencies of spreading misinformation to obscure the truth about the student killings. He urged government officials, including those in the administration and police, to refrain from following "unjust and illegal" instructions. He also warned that as the repression intensified, so too would public resistance.

Tragically, one more life was lost to the violence. Selim Talukder, a 31-year-old factory worker from Narayanganj, succumbed to his injuries at Popular Hospital in Dhammondi. He had suffered 56 shotgun pellet wounds to his chest and 18 to his head after being caught in clashes between police and protesters on July 18 while on his way to work. With his death, the confirmed death toll since July 16 rose to at least 201.

Amid growing outrage, a group of eminent citizens demanded the

immediate release of all detainees within 24 hours. Speaking at a human chain in front of the Detective Branch office on Minto Road under the banner of Aggrieved Citizens' Society, they noted that while the six student leaders had been freed, many teachers, students, and civilians remained in custody.

Later that evening, Abdul Kader, a coordinator of the anti-discrimination student movement, announced fresh programmes for the following day. These included prayers at mosques, temples, and churches, followed by a mass procession after Juma prayers to press home their nine-point demand. Kader urged citizens from all walks of life—teachers, workers, professionals, cultural activists, human rights defenders, intellectuals, and madrasa students—to support the initiative.

Accord reached, dissent noted

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panel. This body will choose a chief adviser from a pool of 12 nominees, submitted by the ruling party, the main opposition, and the second-largest opposition.

If the committee fails to finalise a chief adviser within 120 hours, the ruling party shall propose three names, the main opposition three, and the third-largest party two names within the next 48 hours.

If this process fails, the ruling party and the main opposition will each propose three eligible candidates, while other parties with representation in parliament will propose two more names.

The ruling and opposition blocs will each select one candidate from the other's list. They will also choose one nominee from the smaller parties' list. The nominee receiving the highest number of selections will be appointed chief adviser.

To resolve potential deadlocks, the commission proposed that if no consensus is reached, a nominee backed by any four of the five panel members will be selected. If that fails, two senior judges -- one from the Appellate Division and one from the High Court -- will be added to the panel, expanding it to seven members. The panel will be empowered to resolve the matter through ranked-choice voting.

If a chief adviser still cannot be selected, the appointment process will default to the system outlined in the now-defunct 13th amendment to the constitution. However, under the current proposal, the president will not be eligible to serve as chief adviser.

In the event that the position of chief adviser becomes vacant, the president will appoint the most senior adviser by age. If the senior-most adviser declines, the next in seniority will be appointed.

Several parties, including the BNP, Jatiyatabadi Samamana Jote, the 12-Party Alliance, the NDM, Labour Party, and Khelafat Majlish, formally submitted notes of dissent against the inclusion of judges in the selection process and the use of ranked-choice voting.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed proposed that in case of a stalemate, the matter be referred to parliament for resolution through a vote by MPs.

UPPER HOUSE

The BNP, Jatiyatabadi Samamana Jote, the 12-Party Alliance, the NDM, LDP, and the Gano Forum expressed dissenting views on the idea of forming an upper house through proportional representation based on share of votes obtained by the parties.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BASAD), and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh withdrew entirely from discussions on the proposed upper house, citing the country's economic and social realities.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party (NCP) supported the National Consensus Commission's PR system-based idea.

Per the commission's framework, the upper house would not initiate legislation but would review all bills passed by the lower house, except finance bills. If it withholds approval for more than a month, the bill would be deemed passed. It may return bills with amendment recommendations, but if the lower house passes it again, it may go directly to the president for assent without further upper house approval.

The commission had earlier proposed that the upper house be formed through a PR system based on votes in the lower house election, allowing parties to receive seats proportional to their vote share.

AGREED DURING FIRST ROUND

Appointing a deputy speaker from the opposition

Removal of article 7A and 7B of the constitution

Ratification of international treaties in parliament

Separate secretariat for Supreme Court

Formation of permanent public admin reform commission

NBR to review affidavits of candidates in national polls

While the BNP supported basing representation on lower house seats, Jamaat, NCP, and others favoured the PR-based model.

As division deepened, the commission on July 14 proposed an alternative: an upper house comprising 76 elected representatives -- one from each of the 64 districts and one from each of the 12 city corporations. It had also suggested abolishing the reserved seats for women in the lower house. Elections for both houses would be held simultaneously, the commission had said.

PRESIDENT'S POWERS

The commission proposed increasing the powers of the president by granting him or her direct authority to appoint the chiefs of the armed forces and the directors general of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the National

Security Intelligence (NSI).

It has also proposed giving the president direct authority to appoint the attorney general; the governor of Bangladesh Bank; the chairperson and members of the National Human Rights Commission, the Information Commission, the University Grants Commission, the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) and the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC); and the chairperson of the Bangladesh Press Council and the Law Commission.

Under the current system, the president needs to follow the prime minister's advice when performing duties except when appointing the prime minister and the chief justice.

During the discussion, BNP's Salahuddin and Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher opposed the idea of giving the president direct authority to appoint the chiefs of the armed forces, DGFI, NSI, Bangladesh Bank governor and attorney general.

Salahuddin added that the appointment of the chairperson and members of the BERC and BTRC should not be given under the president's direct authority.

NCP Joint Convenor Javed Rasin opposed the commission's proposal to grant the authority to appoint the Attorney General, the chiefs of the three forces, and the DGs of DGFI and NSI without consulting the prime minister.

After the discussion, the political parties agreed that the president can appoint the governor of Bangladesh Bank,

the chairman and members of NHRC, the Information Commission, and the chairmen of the Press Council, the Law Commission, and BERC.

BOYCOTT ON BASIC PRINCIPLES

Most of the parties agreed on the consensus commission's proposal 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.

Protesting against the commission's proposal, the CPB, Basad, Basad (Marxist) and Bangladesh Jasod boycotted the proceedings while Gano Forum expressed its dissent.

The four leftist parties demanded that the commission propose new basic principles by retaining the existing four principles -- nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism -- which were adopted in 1972.

CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said they cannot compromise on fundamental principles of the state that emerged through the 1971 Liberation War.

HEATED DEBATE

During the discussion, BNP leader Salahuddin said his party had

first floated the upper house idea, envisioning a chamber of experts and distinguished individuals. He opposed the commission's version, arguing that no unelected body should have constitutional authority. "Without a sovereign parliament, no one has the authority to amend a nation's constitution," he said.

After his speech, NCP's Javed Rasin responded, "If the upper house is formed based on proportional representation of votes, it reflects the representation of the people." He then sought Salahuddin's attention. Tension flared as Syed Ehsanul Huda, chairman of Jatiya Dal and coordinator of the 12-Party Alliance, then interjected without the microphone, "Where were you when we were protesting in 2023?"

The exchange escalated, prompting intervention from commission Vice-President Ali Riaz and Salahuddin. Riaz reminded the room, "There's no need to question anyone's locus standi. Everyone has a locus standi -- that's why we are here today." And Salahuddin urged Huda to apologise.

Huda then took the microphone and clarified, "What I meant was that we proposed the idea of the upper house back in 2023, and I was wondering where the PR proposal was at that time. Still, if anyone felt hurt, I am sorry."

Meanwhile, Jamaat's Taher warned at the lunch break that his party would sue both the commission and the government if the July Charter lacked legal grounding. "We believe relying on mere promises isn't enough. If

the charter lacks legitimacy, it will be meaningless. That's why we will file a compensation case against both the commission and the government," he said.

The commission has drafted the charter with reform proposals agreed upon by the parties during the consensus talks. The parties are expected to sign the document, pledging to carry on the reforms.

WAY TO CONSENSUS

The interim government launched six reform commissions in October last year -- on the constitution, electoral system, judiciary, anti-corruption, administration, and police. Their reports were submitted in February, with recommendations classified into those needing legal reform and those implementable via executive action.

The National Consensus Commission, led by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, was formed to build political agreement around the proposals. The commission held 44 meetings with 32 parties between March 20 and May 19 during the first phase. Since June 2, it has hosted 23 more sessions with 30 parties, reaching consensus on all 19 discussed issues.

So far, parties agreed that no individual may serve as prime minister for more than 10 years in total. They accepted a proposal to form an independent police commission, allow MPs to vote across party lines, except on no-confidence motions and finance bills, and give opposition MPs leadership of four parliamentary standing committees.

Inflation, tariff risks keep Bangladesh

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sustained.

Speaking at a press briefing, Governor Ahsan H Mansur underscored the central bank's policy philosophy. "Controlling inflation is crucial, and macroeconomic stability is a prerequisite for sustainable growth. You can boost growth artificially by printing money and increasing expenditure, but that's not sustainable," he said.

While food inflation has broadly moderated, the governor pointed out that rice prices have remained elevated. "Despite record production, rice prices are still rising, perhaps because affluent farmers are stockpiling. But we don't expect prices to rise much further," he said. He also noted a silver lining: "Farmers are happy because they're getting good prices at the farm level. So, there's a positive side to this, too."

Mansur credited market stability for recent inflationary relief. "We were able to manage the supply side. Currently, except for rice, most other prices in the market are stable. If we can maintain this situation, inflation will likely come down. We believe that if other countries can achieve this, Bangladesh can too," he said.

He outlined a long-term target for price stability: "Once inflation drops to single digits, lending rates will no longer be in double digits, and

everything can be kept in real positive terms."

Private sector credit growth has slowed significantly, registering just 6.4 percent in June, the lowest in recent history, as tighter liquidity and elevated borrowing costs continue to bite. The governor acknowledged the strain being placed on businesses. "Those who took loans at 8-9 percent in 2016-17 are now paying 16 percent, despite being regular payers. It's unfortunate, but we can't artificially lower rates without restoring macro stability first," Mansur said.

GROWTH OUTLOOK

Although the economy grew by only 3.97 percent in FY25, well below initial projections, the central bank struck an optimistic tone on recovery prospects. The government has revised its FY26 growth target to 5.5 percent, broadly in line with forecasts from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, which project growth between 4.9 percent and 5.4 percent.

Mansur defended the current growth rate in a regional context. "Our current growth rate is actually solid given the circumstances. In contrast, countries like Pakistan had negative growth. Our figures are clean, no manipulations," he said.

He expressed hope that political calm would continue to support

Tk 3 lakh seized from Dhaka flat used by Riyadh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered around Tk 3 lakh in cash from a flat in the capital's Badda, allegedly used by Abdur Razzak Riyadh, an expelled leader of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), who was recently arrested on extortion charges.

Halizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, confirmed the development to The Daily Star.

Another police official, requesting anonymity, said they suspect the cash was obtained through extortion and are working to determine its exact source.

Riyad and four others were arrested on July 26 from the Gulshan residence of former AL lawmaker Shammī Ahmed after allegedly demanding Tk 50 lakh from her family.

Shammī's husband, Siddique Abu Zafar, alleged that the group, identifying themselves as members of SAD, first visited their home on July 17 and reportedly threatened to hand the family members over to police if the money was not paid.

The family, under duress, paid them Tk 10 lakh. When the group returned to the former AL MP's flat to collect the remaining amount, the family informed law enforcers, who arrested the five from the scene. Later, an extortion case was filed with Gulshan Police Station.

Riyad and three of his associates -- Ibrahim Hossain Munna, convener of SAD's Dhaka city unit; and members Sakadoun Siam and Sadab -- are now on a seven-day remand each in connection with the case. The other arrestee, a minor, was sent to a juvenile correction centre.

During interrogation, police learned the group had also targeted another former AL lawmaker, Abul Kalam Azad, about a month ago. Following this, law enforcers recovered cheques worth Tk 2.25 crore from another flat in Dhaka linked to Riyad.

Police said the cheques were among those forcibly signed by Azad.

Speaking to The Daily Star earlier, Azad said a group of 10-12 individuals, led by Riyad, had stormed his Green Road office on June 26.

