

Nationwide clashes as violence returns

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After nearly two weeks of tense calm, Bangladesh once again plunged into violence on August 2, 2024, as widespread clashes broke out between protesters and police – often aided by ruling party activists – across multiple districts. At least two people were killed and around 150 injured in a day marked by defiant protests, state crackdowns, and growing demands for justice and accountability.

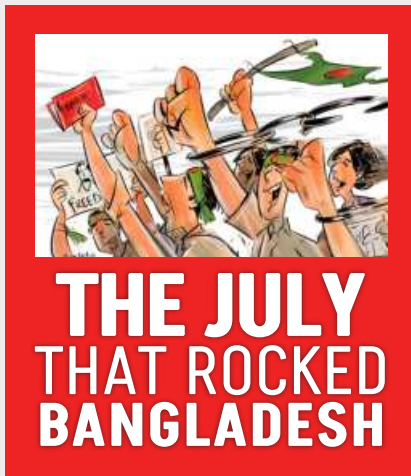
The violence erupted during processions organised by the Students Against Discrimination in Dhaka, Sylhet, Khulna, Chattogram, Habiganj, Narsingdi, Noakhali, and other districts. Thousands of students, cultural workers, and members of the general public defied rain to demand justice for the victims of recent state violence and the immediate release of detained protesters.

In Habiganj, Chhatra League members and students clashed near the Town Hall. Police intervened with teargas and firearms, leaving at least 50 people wounded. A labourer, caught in the crossfire, was killed.

In Khulna, a police constable died after being assaulted during clashes around Khulna University. Police responded with rubber bullets, batons, and teargas, injuring at least 50 protesters.

In Sylhet, violent clashes between law enforcers and protesters in front of Mount Adora Hospital in Akhalia left over 30 injured, including a child, seven policemen, and several protesters.

Chattogram witnessed a police box being torched at Wasa intersection after Juma prayers, while demonstrations



AUGUST 2, 2024

took place on Laldighi Rifles Club Road.

In Noakhali, at least 10 were injured in clashes near Chawkbazar Masjid. In Narsingdi, Chhatra League, Jubo League, and Mahila League members attacked a protest in Court Road area, injuring 12.

A massive rally titled "Droho Jatra" was held in front of the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka. People from all walks of life – students, teachers, guardians, lawyers, civil society members – gathered, braving rain and shouting anti-government slogans. They announced a mass procession for the following day, demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

At the rally, Prof Anu Muhammad stated, "We don't want anything from this government. The government must resign. The people must take back control of the country and ensure



Protesters gather in large numbers at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital on the afternoon of August 2, 2024, demanding justice for those killed during the quota reform protests.

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

a democratic transition."

Throughout the capital, protests blocked key intersections – Uttara, Science Lab, Mirpur-10, Shahbagh, and Aftabnagar. Students of East West University and BRAC University led processions, while performance artists staged street dramas and symbolic protests. Human chains were formed by groups of doctors, urban planners, authors, poets, and teachers demanding an end to the killings, curfew, and arrests.

STATEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY

At least 626 faculty members of BRAC University expressed concern over the violence and reaffirmed students' rights to peaceful protest. Authors and academics condemned the police brutality under the banner of "Poets and Writers Against Countrywide Arrests and Oppression".

In the afternoon, Students Against Discrimination announced a countrywide non-cooperation movement starting the next day, reinforcing their nine-point demand, which includes justice for the July killings, release of detainees, withdrawal of curfew, and resignation of the government.

Meanwhile, the six key organisers of the quota reform movement issued a statement declaring that the video of them withdrawing from the protests had been filmed under coercion while they were in custody at the Detective Branch office.

To control the narrative, the government once again imposed a social media blackout, cutting off Facebook and Messenger services for about seven hours starting around noon.

Cambodia to nominate Trump for Nobel Prize

Says deputy PM following his intervention in halting border conflict with Thailand

REUTERS, Phnom Penh

Cambodia will nominate US President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, its deputy prime minister said yesterday, following his direct intervention in halting the Southeast Asian country's recent border conflict with Thailand.

Asked via text message to confirm Cambodia's plan to nominate Trump for the prize, Chanthol responded, "yes."

Speaking to reporters earlier in the capital, Phnom Penh, Chanthol thanked Trump for bringing peace and said he deserved to be nominated for the prize, the highest-profile international award given to an individual or organisation deemed to have done the most to "advance fellowship between nations".

'India an ally, but can't align 100pc of time'

Says US top diplomat Marco Rubio on Trump tariffs

NDTV ONLINE

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday said that India's purchase of oil from Russia is "most certainly a point of irritation" in New Delhi's relationship with Washington.

Speaking to Fox Radio a day after US President Donald Trump announced a 25 percent tariff on India and an additional penalty for buying Russian military equipment and energy, Rubio said that India's purchases of Russian oil are helping to sustain Moscow's war efforts in Ukraine.

"Look, global trade - India is an ally. It's a strategic partner. Like anything in foreign policy, you're not going to align 100 percent of the time on everything," Rubio said when asked if Trump is "upset" with India getting a "great portion" of the discounted oil from Russia.

Bangladesh gains edge after US tariff cut Breathing room for exporters

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five categories alone make up 80 percent of Bangladesh's apparel shipments to the US, keeping the overall rate competitive.

Vietnam, while facing the same base rate as Bangladesh, could see its added levies surge to 52 percent when applied to high-end apparels. This burden is intensified by a 40 percent US duty on Chinese goods rerouted through Vietnam.

China itself is contending with a potential 55 percent tariff, pending negotiations.

As the third-largest apparel supplier to the US with a 9.3 percent market share, and now ahead of China in trouser and denim exports, Bangladesh is poised to consolidate its gains by capturing significant orders from US buyers looking to diversify their supply chains.

The new tariff rate, announced by the White House yesterday, was hailed across government and industry circles.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus called it a "decisive diplomatic victory", crediting the negotiation team's "strategic acumen". He said, "This preserves our comparative advantage and secures access to the world's largest consumer market."

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin noted that although Bangladesh had sought a lower rate, the final outcome still protected its competitive standing. National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, a member of the negotiation team, added that the agreement includes pledges to import US agricultural goods – a step aligned with Bangladesh's food security goals and is expected to build goodwill in key American farming states.

Industry leaders welcomed the deal, albeit with cautious optimism. Rubana Huq, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the agreement will help Bangladesh "retain competitiveness in a tough market".

Current BGMEA president Mahmud Hasan Khan called the revised rate a "relief" but added that its true impact would depend on "consumer responses in the next retail season".

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, executive

WHAT BANGLADESH OFFERED

- Purchase of 25 Boeing aircraft
- Purchasing 3.5 million tonnes of American wheat over next 5 years
- Building warehouse to facilitate US cotton in Bangladesh
- Import of more US cotton, LNG
- Import of more US soybean, other agricultural products
- Removing trade barriers to facilitate US export here
- Removal of import duty on many US goods

president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, welcomed the move towards a near uniform tariff structure among US trading partners. "Keeping major apparel-exporting countries within the 19-20 percent range helps stabilise global competitiveness," he said.

From the textile supply side, Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association and a private-sector delegate in the talks, pointed out that the deal opens the door to importing up to \$2 billion worth of US cotton in a major rebalancing, as only 5 percent of Bangladesh's \$4 billion in cotton imports currently comes from the US.

Private importer Mohammed Amirul Haque said American exporters of soybeans, cotton, and LPG had also pushed for a favourable tariff regime with Bangladesh, aligning commercial interests across both economies.

Still, challenges remain. Faisal Samad, managing director of Surma

Garments Ltd, cautioned that rising production costs could offset the benefits of the tariff cut. "China will inevitably recalibrate to regain competitiveness," he said.

The tariff cut also reflects a broader shift in US trade policy.

"It's a strategic shift, not just towards Bangladesh but towards many partners," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). "Sri Lanka's rate, for example, was cut from 30 percent to 20 percent, and Pakistan's from 29 percent to 19 percent."

In the political sphere, the BNP described the US tariff cut as "satisfactory" for Bangladeshi exporters, while the Jamaat-e-Islami thanked Trump for lowering the rate.

Speaking to reporters at his residence in Gulshan, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "This is not about winning or losing... I think overall the tariff figure is satisfactory in terms of competition."

"...the tariff won't harm our export market at this moment. So, for now, it's a satisfactory decision."

Khosru, a former commerce minister, declined to comment on the impact of the new tariff rate, saying, "We don't know the full details of the whole negotiation. We only know about the tariff part. After knowing the full details, we'll be able to comment on this."

Asked about the decision to purchase 25 Boeing planes from the US, Khosru said Bangladesh had to do something to cut the trade gap with the US as sought by the Trump administration.

"But while doing that, how much Bangladesh can absorb, how much our economy can absorb, how much our businessmen can absorb – these are things to talk about," he said.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman thanked the Trump administration for its sincerity and the interim government of Yunus for its effective initiatives in having the tariff lowered.

In a Facebook post, he expressed hope that in the future, Yunus and those who will come to the power will maintain their honourable position and fulfill their dignified duties in the arena of world diplomacy.

authoritarian forces and citizens. If implementation falters, our efforts will be wasted. The people expect a new state structure based on accountability, decentralisation, and balance of power."

The NCP leader added that most political parties supported the commission taking the lead in developing an implementation roadmap.

"We commend the commission for its patience and initiative. But now, it must move urgently to finalise a concrete path forward," he said.

Responding to these concerns, Commission Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz said that once the final draft is ready, it will be sent to political parties for feedback.

"If necessary, the commission will sit again to discuss the roadmap for implementing the charter," he added.

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about losing competitiveness in the US market, the single biggest destination for Bangladesh's goods, after the Trump administration announced a 35 percent tariff, albeit lower than the initial plan of 37 percent, which would be added to the existing average of around 16 percent.

"While the revised rate is 20 percent on Bangladesh's exports to the US, it could raise the effective duty to as high as 35 percent in some cases," said AK Azad, chairman and managing director of Ha-Meem Group, a leading exporter to the US.

"Still, we remain competitive. With India facing a higher duty, some US orders may shift towards Bangladesh."

He added that the 20 percent duty is not uniform across all goods.

"Many of our exports fall under lower tariffs, but there's concern that buyers may use this hike to pressure us for price reductions. Negotiation pressure from buyers is expected. The industry must act collectively and strategically to handle this."

Azad, a former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said that since Vietnam faces similar tariffs in the US market, there is no added competition from their side.

But Cambodia and Indonesia face 19 percent tariffs in the American market, placing Bangladesh at a mildly disadvantageous position.

"There's still scope for negotiation," he said, "Government efforts must continue, and trade bodies can play a key role. Even a one percent tariff reduction could significantly ease pressure on exporters."

"We must remain cautious," he said, mentioning that India is in talks for a reduction from the 25 percent tariff.

Pakistan, having access to local raw materials, enjoys a 19 percent tariff. This will increase its competitiveness."

Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said, "Though we'll not face intense competitive pressure from our competitors from Vietnam, US buyers will try to pass the extra burden of the tariff on to us. Middle and small manufacturers will face a significant challenge to retain US buyers as they will bargain for a price cut."

He expressed concern that prices of imported goods would rise in America due to the new tariff, leading to a decline in consumer demand.

"So, the volume of orders from US buyers will fall," added Parvez, who is also a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Riad Mahmud, managing director of N Poly, a non-leather shoe exporter to the US market, said, "We expect that orders which have been put on hold by buyers will come back, as the tariff rate remains the same as that of our main competitor, Vietnam. But I assume that US buyers will bargain for a price reduction in a way that we absorb part of the tariff burden," he added.

"Ultimately, US customers will suffer. They will have to spend extra

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President of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries

Our buyers are under pressure and are asking us for more concessions. We need to work wisely, not just by offering low prices, but by providing excellent service and maintaining strong, trustworthy relationships.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury
CEO of Pran-RFL Group

accelerating the shift towards higher-value, sustainable apparel production and enhanced industry standards. By investing in efficiency, technology, and design, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector can retain its edge in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

"With the right strategy and bold initiatives, this could be a turning point, transforming Bangladesh into a more agile, innovative, and globally respected sourcing hub," he added.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of Pran-RFL Group, expressed concern that the 20 percent tariff will directly impact the group's exports to the US.

He cited a recent conversation with a US buyer and added that the buyer reportedly asked the company to absorb part of the tariffs by lowering export prices.

"This is quite challenging for us," he said. "We operate on very thin margins, and as a developing country, we have limited financial resources. But we still need to hold our ground in the US market."

He termed the move a "step backwards for global trade," adding, "Tariffs like these don't just hurt us but disrupt the entire global trade ecosystem."

"The burden of this tariff will ultimately fall on American consumers. Prices will go up, and it will become increasingly difficult for middle class families in the US to bear the cost."

Chowdhury emphasised the need for consistent engagement with the US market.

"The battle isn't over yet. Tariffs change over time, and we need to stay alert to seize any opportunity that comes our way."

"We must continue working proactively with American stakeholders, build stable trade relations, and look for ways to reduce our production costs in order to remain competitive."

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A decisive diplomatic

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skill and unwavering commitment to protecting and advancing Bangladesh's economic interests," Yunus said in a statement.

He noted that the team had worked relentlessly since February, navigating a complex process involving tariff, non-tariff, and national security issues.

"The deal preserves our comparative advantage, boosts access to the world's largest consumer market, and safeguards our core national interests," he said.

Yunus said the achievement highlights Bangladesh's growing influence on the global stage and paves the way for greater opportunities, faster growth, and lasting prosperity.

"Today's success is a powerful testament to our national resilience and bold vision for a stronger economy."

Parties split over making July Charter

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the National Citizen Party (NCP), Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and several other parties have demanded a clear legal foundation for the charter.

Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher warned that his party would file a compensation lawsuit against both the government and the commission if the charter lacked legal validity.

"BNP claims the charter needs no legal basis, but relying on promises isn't enough. If it lacks legitimacy, it will be meaningless," he said.

"Even an oath means nothing without action."

Taher stressed that legal implementation is both feasible and essential.

"Those who claim it can't be done are misleading the nation. If there's no legal backing, signing or not signing will both be meaningless. The reform

process would remain incomplete."

He urged the government and the commission to avoid what he called "another farce" with the people. "Those who made promises must now fulfil them," he added.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen echoed the demand for legal grounding.

"While consensus was reached on several issues, implementation details remain vague," he said.

"The preliminary draft mentions that reforms will be carried out within two years of the next parliament's formation. But if implementation is delayed or left to a future government, it could result in uncertainty and crisis."

Akhter warned that such ambiguity risks undermining the entire process.

"The charter emerged from long deliberations among anti-