

Equipped to inflict heavy casualties

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In July 2024, as The Daily Star analysed ballistics being used in the protest sites, Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain, now labour and shipping adviser, had told this newspaper, “The 7.62mm rifles used by police have two modes – single firing and rapid firing. In the videos we have seen, they have mostly used the rapid-fire mode or automatic mode, which are mostly used in wars.” He had called them the “best Chinese killing machines”.

In January this year, the Police Headquarters’ Arms and Ammunition Entitlement Committee itself recommended replacing the 7.62mm rifles with pistols to “reduce casualties”.

The police headquarters did not respond to our emails and text messages about the justification of procurement of such lethal weapons, and what they plan to do with those weapons in the future.

AN UNEXPLAINED ARSENAL
The police’s weaponry extended well beyond 7.62 Type 56 rifles. In 2022, they acquired two categories of machine guns.

One was the 9mm MSG-9P submachine gun (SMG) from Turkey. Just one shipment of these guns weighed 7.52 tonnes, and was procured at a cost of Tk 51.4 crore.

Although its exact firing range, muzzle velocity and rate of fire (rounds per minute) is not clear, other similar models can shoot several hundred rounds per minute. With twin 30-round magazines and rapid-fire capacity, the manufacturer’s website boasts its “superior firepower in close-quarters combat”.

The other was a more ominous acquisition: 15 units of the crew-served 12.7x99 mm NATO machine

gun, also called Browning Machine Gun. This specific type of long-range weapon has to be mounted on a tripod and is used for shooting distant targets.

The Daily Star has found no evidence that the Browning Machine Gun was deployed during the uprising.

A former senior official of the

per minute,” said the official. “There is only one place in the country which has the depth of field needed for shooting training of this weapon, and that is in Chattogram’s Bhatiari.

“It is unthinkable that the police would need this,” he added.

A LEGACY OF MILITARISATION
The Daily Star had previously reported that the police began militarising

escalated over the decade.

Between 2021 and 2022, police procured 14,600 Glocks (handheld pistols) and 8,000 other 9mm pistols, backed by 15 lakh rounds of ammunition.

The UN Fact-finding mission received a report from the police during its investigation, where the police divulged that the 7.62mm

Court lawyer and researcher at Lawyers for Energy, Environment and Development, said his team recorded at least 4,634 instances of live bullet use by analysing 100 cases filed by the police during the uprising.

“We observed from the police’s own declarations that they had used lethal weapons more than non-lethal weapons. The usage suggests that they had a massive amount of lethal weapons,” said Dr Iqbal.

His team documented the use of 7.62mm semiautomatic rifles, submachine guns, BD08 assault rifles, Taurus 9mm revolvers and Type 54 pistols.

Lead pellets have been proven to be deadly in the field, leading to the deaths of many protesters, including Farhaan Faiyaz, a Class XI student at Dhaka Residential Model College. He was killed on July 18, 2024, during the quota reform protests in Dhanmondi and his body was peppered with shotgun pellets.

Between 2021 and 2023, the police purchased 18,000 pieces of 12-bore shotguns and spent Tk 16.5 crores on purchasing lead pellets.

The UN report confirmed their use in “numerous locations.”

QUESTIONS OF LEGALITY
Major Gen (retd) ANM Muniruzzaman, president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, said police are legally barred from importing “prohibited bore” weapons without a clearance from the Bangladesh Army’s Directorate of Weapon, Equipment & Statistics.

Bangladeshi law categorises firearms as “prohibited bore” and “non-prohibited bore”, with the latter being smaller calibre handguns. All the lethal firearms mentioned above are “prohibited bore” according to Muniruzzaman.

Multiple sources from the customs department said that the shipments of the SMGs and machine guns were cleared by the home ministry.

Meanwhile, the clearance papers of the 18,000 pieces of 7.62mm semi-automatics show that the firearms were cleared by the inspector general of police from Police Headquarters, while the Chattogram Metropolitan Police signed to release the shipment from Chattogram Customs.

The documents obtained do not mention whether permission was sought from the army’s weapons directorate.

FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE
Turkey was a top supplier of weapons to Bangladesh Police, with eight companies providing Tk 134 crore worth of ammunition.

Purchases included submachine guns, pistols, 12-bore shotguns, lead pellets, and CornerShot attachments.

The United States was another top source, with six suppliers delivering Tk 56 crore worth of weapons, including crew-served machine guns and Glock pistols.

China followed, selling Tk 44 crore in arms through six suppliers. China provided 18,000 semi-automatic rifles for Tk 30 crore and also supplied ammunition over multiple years.

The police also imported lead pellets worth Tk 8.5 crore from Spain and Cyprus.

Note: The Daily Star relied on shipment and import records for this story. In the case of certain shipments for lead bullets and rubber bullets, the quantity imported was not mentioned, but the net weight of the consignment was mentioned. In those cases, we obtained the individual weights of each of the bullets from supplier websites and arrived at estimates for the quantity.

Indigenous communities

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It cited past attacks – from the killing of three Santal men in Gobindaganj in 2016 to the torching of the CHT Regional Council office in 2024 – as examples where justice has been slow or absent.

The organisation urged the government to ensure independent investigations, prosecute perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law and protect the rights and dignity of indigenous communities.

Last year’s July uprising aimed to eliminate all forms of discrimination, Pallab Chakma, founder of the Kapaeeng Foundation, told The Daily Star.

“But what we have seen is that we remain just as vulnerable as we were since Independence. We were excluded during the drafting of the 1972 Constitution, and even after the July uprising, we continue to be excluded.”

There was no representation of indigenous people in the major reform commissions, including the Constitution Reform Commission, he said.

“What have we demanded? We have only demanded constitutional recognition. Is that too much to ask?”

The indigenous community is worse off since the interim government assumed office, Chakma said.

“Our girls were raped and murdered. Our people were killed. Our lands were grabbed. Attempts were made to incite communal violence across the Chittagong Hill Tracts. But have we received justice for any of these incidents?”

He demanded that the government bring all perpetrators to justice, ensure both accountability and constitutional recognition for the indigenous communities and ensure all the rights they are entitled to.

The interim government did not even include a single word regarding indigenous communities in the much-discussed July Declaration, said Dipayon Khisa, a central committee member of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti.

“As far as we know, there is no such clause that mentions indigenous issues in the July Charter formulated by the National Consensus Commission. The commission did not even invite any group representing indigenous communities. Even the government, which claims to be working for national reform, appears indifferent to our issues.”

Govt bins ex-secy’s remarks about advisers

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involved in widespread corruption.

He made the allegation while speaking on Friday as a guest at a seminar titled “Expectations of the July Uprising and the Future of Public Administration”, organised by the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association (BASA), a platform of administration cadre officials.

Although he indicated one or two ministries, he did not mention any names. However, he claimed to have evidence to support his allegations.

The cabinet secretary’s statement said, “If Mr Abdus Sattar possesses credible

Working to restore

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responsibilities, all actions will strictly follow the rules, regulations and laws. We will not deviate from this path.”

About the voter apathy, he further said, “Over the years, people have become disengaged from the voting process. Many no longer feel the urge to go to polling stations. A mindset has developed where people assume their votes don’t matter, that someone else will cast them anyway. Changing this mentality is one of our biggest challenges.”

He stressed that strong law and order is a prerequisite for credible elections. “The law and order situation is currently stable, and we aim to make it even better so that citizens can vote peacefully and without fear.”

The CEC called for the media’s cooperation to raise awareness and promote voter engagement. “Awareness remains key, and the media plays a vital role in this regard. We welcome both the cooperation

and the constructive criticism from professional journalists.”

He, however, expressed concerns over misinformation and the unregulated use of digital platforms. “Misuse of artificial intelligence has become a greater threat than traditional weapons. While we do not see ethical journalism as a challenge, those who spread misinformation via social media without proper training or ethics pose a serious problem.”

The CEC also revealed that the Election Commission is taking steps to exclude individuals with a history of misconduct from poll-related duties.

“While we can’t bring in people from abroad to conduct elections, we are working strategically to ensure that only credible personnel are involved.”

He recalled the elections of 1991 and 1996, widely regarded as free and fair, conducted by the people of this country. “We must place our faith in the people. If we can convince them of our sincerity and commitment, we believe they will rise to the occasion and uphold democratic values.”

600 acres set aside

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US government.

For instance, if a T-shirt is made with at least 20 percent American cotton, the US customs will not apply the 20 percent tariff on the value of the good.

Some local garment exporters can use up to 40 percent US cotton in making the garment.

So, the local spinners, millers, traders and users will favour the import of American cotton despite the higher prices, Russell said.

The duty benefit on the garment exports made out of American cotton was a long-time demand of Bangladeshi garment makers, said Faruque Hassan, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

“So the move to scale up cotton imports from the US was a good decision for Bangladesh,” he said.

However, it would be difficult to increase the import of US cotton in a year as many mills have a shortfall of working capital and the banks may not be interested in financing them

evidence of misconduct, we urge him to submit it promptly to the appropriate legal and investigative authorities.

“Until such evidence is presented, we remind all stakeholders that public discourse should be grounded in facts, not speculation.”

Talking to the media last night, BNP leader Fakhrul said that Sattar’s opinions reported by the media were Sattar’s own, not the party’s views.

“This has nothing to do with us [BNP]. We have great respect for the chief adviser and all the advisers of this interim government, and we have confidence in them, in their integrity.”

Ukraine won’t gift

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“It is truly important that the Russians do not succeed in deceiving anyone again,” Zelensky said after a call with French President Emmanuel Macron, without elaborating further.

Three rounds of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine this year have failed to bear fruit, and it remains unclear whether a summit could bring peace any closer as the warring sides’ positions are still far apart.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with millions forced to flee their homes.

Putin has resisted multiple calls from the United States, Europe and Kyiv for a ceasefire.

99% of govt reforms

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Association of Bangladesh (DAB) yesterday, the BNP leader said if his party gets the public mandate to form the government, it will need everyone’s cooperation to implement the 31 proposals, including the health sector reforms.

“In particular, we will need your (doctors’) support to carry out the specific point in the 31 points that deal with healthcare. Because implementing these 31 points is not something the government alone, our party’s MPs alone, or just our leaders can do. To make this happen, we will need the cooperation of every single person,” he said.

The National Council 2025 of DAB, a pro-BNP platform for doctors, was held at the auditorium of Willes Little Flower School and College in the capital’s Kakrail area.

Tarique said people believe that the BNP would at least take the initiative to ensure a better future, especially as the party has the “highest potential” to run the country through an election. “For that reason, they expect the BNP to deliver something better, a positive change... BNP must take the first steps to bring about that change.”

Tarique also said ensuring government accountability to people requires the establishment of democratic practices across all sectors of the country.

“The people of Bangladesh have many expectations from the BNP. One of the most fundamental among them is to establish a proper system and ensure accountability,” he said.

The BNP leader said people from

all walks of life are now looking forward to seeing a positive change and a transformation in the state system. “If we can gradually build a transparent, fair and democratic system everywhere, we will be able to ensure accountability at all levels,” he said.

Tarique said it is not entirely true that there is no democratic practice within political parties. “Today’s DAB council proves that the claim of no democratic practice inside political parties is not entirely accurate.”

He mentioned that since DAB has begun practising democracy, BNP will also be able to gradually implement democratic practices at various levels within the party. “I firmly believe that, Insha’Allah, we can gradually introduce accountability at all levels – from local to national – across the country,” the BNP leader said.

Drawing from his long experience of living in London, he explained that in the UK, doctors who face abuse receive justice, and if patients or others are denied proper service, they too receive justice, as there is accountability in the state system. “Such a system of accountability is needed in Bangladesh.”

Tarique said it is not only about patients, but about everyone – wherever they go, they should receive the service they are entitled to. “This is because, through years of effort, they built a system of accountability in society and in the state system. But this has not yet been developed in Bangladesh.”

Speaking at the programme, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir called Tarique the “future

History has been distorted

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developments following the change in government, citing improvements in foreign reserves and remittance inflows, and promising initiatives in the banking sector.

“However, there has been no visible progress in recovering defaulted loans or repatriating laundered funds,” he added.

Prof Anu also criticised the government for the “Non-Disclosure Agreement” signed recently with the United States, saying that such an agreement was signed to conceal details of a “subservient and anti-national deal”.

He also slammed global and multilateral lenders like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), saying they have “exploited and oppressed” the people of Bangladesh through various debt-laden projects over the last 15 years.

However, instead of evaluating these projects, dependence on foreign lenders has been strengthened in the country in the past year, he said.

Regarding false cases filed during the past regime, Prof Anu said the government has prioritised withdrawing cases involving the powerful but has made no progress

on those filed against workers.

“More than 20,000 cases remain pending against workers. Meanwhile, cases involving the powerful, like Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, have been withdrawn swiftly.

“Judicial independence has not been ensured over the past year. Most decisions are still influenced by directives from above.”

Although a commission was formed to investigate enforced disappearances, Prof Anu noted that no commission has been formed to probe crossfire incidents.

He also pointed out the lack of satisfactory progress in cases of mob violence, attacks on minorities, and the vandalism of religious and archaeological sites.

Prof Anu also stressed the need to ensure accountability of intelligence agencies and reform surveillance practices.

He added that no steps have been taken to reform the surveillance system acquired from Israel during the Awami League government.

Among others, writer and researcher Kallol Mustafá, Dhaka University teacher Moshahida Sultana, filmmaker Akram Khan, and architect Farhana Sharmin Emu also spoke at the meeting.