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25 former, serving military officers charged at ICT

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

The prosecution yesterday formally charged 28 people, including ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 23 top and mid-ranking current and former army officers, at International Crimes Tribunal-1 in two cases of enforced disappearances, secret detention, and torture in the 15 years of her rule.

In a third case, formal charges were pressed against former Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) officials Lt Col Redwanul Islam, Major Md Rafat Bin Alam Mun and two police officers over the killings of 28 people and crimes against humanity in Rampura during the July uprising last year.

Altogether in the three cases -- two over enforced disappearance and one over killings in Rampura -- 25 former and serving army officers have been formally charged.

In both cases of enforced disappearance, Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former defence and security adviser to Hasina, is a co-accused of the deposed prime minister. Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal is also accused in one of these cases.

A prosecutor told The Daily Star that in the two cases, nine of the accused are former and 13 are serving army officers. They had served in the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab). It could not be confirmed whether another brigadier general accused in one of the cases is currently in service or retired.

The tribunal took cognisance of all the charges in the three cases and issued arrest warrants against the accused. The three-member panel fixed October 22 for the next hearing and directed the authorities concerned to produce the accused that day.



This Water Development Board embankment on the Dhaki River in Khulna's Dakop upazila collapsed under pressure during the full moon tide on Tuesday. Homes, fish farms, ponds, and hundreds of bighas of Aman paddy and other crops went underwater as the breach flooded Uttar Kaminibasia, Botbunia, Nishankhali, and Arakhali villages under Tildanga union. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



This is an unprecedented development. In the past, no military officers were ever charged with crimes against humanity, so the question of their trial in a civil court simply did not arise.

Maj Gen (retd) ANM Muniruzzaman



This is the first time in Bangladesh's history that serving military officers have been charged in a civil court for alleged crimes against humanity.

"This is an unprecedented development," said Maj Gen (retd) ANM Muniruzzaman. "In the past, no military officers were ever charged with crimes against humanity, so the question of their trial in a civil court simply did not arise. Offences by serving officers were typically tried in military courts under service regulations," he told The Daily Star.

Speaking to journalists after filing the charges, Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said that under the amended law, individuals can no longer be treated as serving officers once they are formally charged in the ICT.

On Monday, the government amended the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, barring individuals facing formal charges from holding or running for public office. They are also ineligible for appointment to or for holding any service of the republic.

During the hearing, Tajul read out the formal charges, naming the accused and the specific allegations against them.

Several victims of enforced disappearance, including former Brig Gen Abdullahil Aman Azmi, son of late Jamaat-e-Islami chief Ghulam Azam, Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, son of late Jamaat leader Mir Quasem Ali, Humam Quader Chowdhury, son of late BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, Mikel Chakma, and former army officer Hasinur Rahman, were present in court.

Tajul said the tribunal instructed relevant agencies, including the police and the services where the accused are employed, to carry out the arrests.

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EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Ex-Rab men give chilling accounts of Ziaul's role

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances with the support of the cultural ministry produced a documentary titled "Unfolding the Truth" in which former Rab officers directly implicated Maj Gen Ziaul Ahsan.

Ziaul Ahsan, now behind bars, led Rab's intelligence wing as its additional director general (operations) and served as the director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre until August 5, 2024.

Nur Khan Liton, a commission member, in the documentary said, "There is an army camp at the foot of that bridge. A trawler had been brought there from the Sundarbans... the boat recovered from

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Displaced Palestinian children search for items that could be used as fuel for cooking amid a pile of garbage at the Bureij camp for refugees in the central Gaza Strip.

PHOTO: AFP

JULY CHARTER IMPLEMENTATION

Parties sharply split over referendum timing

Commission likely to give options to govt by Sunday

MD ABBAS

The National Consensus Commission's talks with political parties ended yesterday with no agreement on the timing of a referendum to secure public approval for implementing the July Charter.

While the BNP and its allies proposed holding the referendum on the same day as the next general election in February 2026, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the National Citizen Party (NCP), and several others insisted it be held earlier, preferably by November.

As the meeting, which began in the afternoon and continued until 11:15pm, concluded without a consensus, commission members said they would now prepare a proposal package for the interim government based on the opinions of both political parties and constitutional experts.

The commission's term ends on October 15, and it plans to submit its final report, including the completed charter, to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus by next Sunday. A signing ceremony for the charter is expected before the commission's term expires.

After the meeting, Commission Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz told reporters that experts made five key recommendations, including a special order to implement the charter; a referendum under that order; and two

questions on ballot to reflect both agreement and dissent.

The experts also recommended elections to both a Constitution Reform Assembly and the next parliament. They said the approved reforms from the charter must be incorporated into the constitution within a fixed timeframe.

According to commission sources, after collecting opinions from all sides, the commission will hold an internal meeting today to finalise its written recommendations to the government on implementing the July Charter.

Riaz added that the commission would finalise its advice within one or two days and send it to the government while informing all participating parties.

Earlier in the day, the commission also held a two-hour consultation with constitutional experts, who warned that holding the referendum under an ordinance could create legal complications since such ordinances

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Israel detains Shahidul Alam and 144 others

Bangladesh approaches Middle Eastern ally to secure his release

STAR REPORT

Another Gaza-bound aid flotilla, this one carrying Bangladeshi photographer and writer Shahidul Alam and over 140 journalists, doctors and activists from all over the world, was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters yesterday.

As part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC), Shahidul's ship, the Conscience, along with eight other smaller vessels, was sailing toward war-ravaged Gaza to challenge Israel's blockade and deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

This is the second such interception, after Israel last week stopped about 40 vessels and detained more than 450 activists in an aid convoy, the Global Sumud Flotilla, that was also attempting to deliver supplies to Gaza.

In a prerecorded video message posted on Facebook around 10:20am yesterday, Shahidul introduced himself and said, "If you are seeing this video, we have been intercepted at sea, and I've been kidnapped by the occupation forces of Israel, the country conducting genocide in Gaza with the active collaboration and assistance of the USA and other Western powers."

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Public admin adrift amid leadership vacuum

BAHARAM KHAN

For the first time in two decades, the public administration ministry has been running without a secretary for more than two weeks.

The vital position remains vacant at a time when the ministry is struggling to restore stability and a sense of ease in the civil administration that descended into disarray following the Awami League government's fall on August 5 last year.

What the administration needed was firm steps from the interim government to navigate its way out of troubled waters. Instead, the government made some decisions that sparked controversies, with the latest one being the transfer of the public administration secretary to the Planning Commission as a member.

To the astonishment of many, the secretary accepted the transfer to a less significant post, slipping from the third-highest position in bureaucracy to one of less importance.

Over the past two decades, no public administration secretary has been reassigned to such a role.

Secretaries appointed on contract are expected to complete their terms since the very purpose of such practice is to bring in qualified and experienced individuals to carry out specific responsibilities. Once the purpose is fulfilled, the logical course of action is to either release them or extend their contracts.

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