



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and three other advisers pose for photos with delegations of Jamaat-e-Islami and NCP after separate meetings with each party yesterday.

PHOTOS: PID

MEDIA WORKER DEATH Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee demands fair investigation

Urge establishing anti-harassment cells in all workplaces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee has demanded a fair probe into the death of media worker Sornomoye Biswas and called for the strict enforcement of anti-harassment policies in workplaces.

In a statement issued yesterday, the committee said that Sornomoye and several colleagues had filed sexual harassment complaints against Altaf Shahnewaz, head of Dhaka Stream's Bangla department, but the management failed to act, leaving her mentally distressed.

The statement was signed by noted economist Prof Anu Muhammad, Dhaka University teachers Samina Luthfa and Dr Nazmus Sakib, economist Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, researcher Ferdous Ara Rume, activist Sajib Tanvir, and writer Seema Dutta.

"The mental and physical conditions of victims are often ignored. Not only the perpetrator, but also the management and investigators share responsibility. Dhaka Stream's Editor-in-Chief Golam Iftekhar Mahmud, and inquiry officers must be held accountable," the statement read.

It also noted Dhaka Stream's failure to implement the 2009 High Court directive of establishing of anti-sexual harassment cells in workplaces. "Such environments [without such cells] force women out of the workforce and erode their professional motivation."

The committee urged the government to ensure a transparent investigation, hold the accused accountable, and enforce the HC guidelines across all institutions.

Sornomoye Biswas, a freelance graphic designer working for the online portal Dhaka Stream, was found dead at her residence on October 19.

Dhaka ratifies 3 more ILO conventions

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repeated industrial disasters and continuing concerns over workers' rights.

"This day will be remembered as a milestone in Bangladesh's struggle for workers' rights," Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said after the signing of the instruments of ratification for the three conventions.

Labour and Employment Adviser Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain signed the instruments at the state guesthouse Jamuna. CA's Special Envoy for International Affairs Lutfey Siddiqi, Labour and Employment Secretary Sanwar Jahan Bhuiyan, and ILO Country Director Max Tunon, among others, were present.

Recalling the Rana Plaza tragedy of 2013, Prof Yunus said that although the then government had pledged various reforms after the incident, little had been implemented. "We said, no more 'being done or will be done'; we will actually do it."

He added that upon taking office, his first focus was on labour rights and that the signing of these conventions would benefit all.

"This is only the beginning. Signing the documents does not mean the work is done; the work has just begun," he said.

Labour Adviser Sakhawat said everyone had worked extremely hard for this achievement and added that the interim government had been sincerely working to protect workers' rights from the outset.

Lutfey Siddiqi said the journey had been difficult but rewarding, noting that all parties had worked tirelessly to make it possible.

With the ratification of these three conventions, Bangladesh has become the only country in South Asia to ratify all 10 fundamental ILO conventions, the statement added.

ICT sends 15 army officers to jail

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prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her former defence adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique stand accused in both cases. Besides Tarique Ahmed Siddique, nine retired senior army officers are also among the accused.

Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and three former Rab chiefs are also accused in the case involving the alleged torture in the TFI Cell.

In the third case over the killings of 28 people during the student-led protests in Rampura on July 18-19 last year, two former BGB officers -- Lt Col Mohammad Redowan Islam and Maj Rafat Bin Alam Moon -- were produced before the tribunal. They too are originally from the army.

The next hearing was set for November 5 in this case. Two police officers, currently absconding, are also accused in the case.

As law enforcers failed to arrest the remaining accused, the tribunal ordered public notices in two newspapers, asking absconding suspects to appear within seven days.

HEARING

Around 7:15am, the army officers were brought to the tribunal in an air-conditioned prison bus. Police escorted each officer to the lock-up on the tribunal's ground floor.

Ten of the officers accused in the case involving the alleged torture in the TFI Cell were first taken to the dock, minutes before the tribunal began proceedings at 8:15am.

As the session opened, the tribunal chair read out their names one by one, asking each to stand. At that, the officers confirmed their presence.

They were followed by three former DGFI officers accused in the case involving the alleged torture in the JIC and two accused in the Rampura killings case.

The 15 accused were taken back to the prison bus from the lock-up around 10:00am.

A heavy security blanket was thrown around the tribunal premises ahead of the hearing, with personnel from Rab, BGB, police, and the Armed Police Battalion deployed to maintain order.

Lawyer M Sarwar Hossain, who represented the accused army officers, submitted three petitions seeking bail, permission for appearance of the accused via video link, and privileged communication.

The tribunal said it would look into the appeals for bail and online appearance later, directing the lawyer to have the vikalatnamas (official document that allows a lawyer to represent a client in court) signed to formally represent the officers and hold privileged communications.

Sarwar told the tribunal that his clients appeared before the tribunal following the court's order.

Countering Sarwar's claim, ICT

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam told the tribunal that the army officers did not appear voluntarily, but were arrested by law enforcers.

Sarwar later told reporters that the officers "voluntarily surrendered out of respect for the law" and were "innocent professionals who hope to prove their innocence".

"These officers are courageous, innocent, and have surrendered believing that they will be proved innocent ultimately," he said.

He claimed the real perpetrators had fled abroad and said the officers were likely to be kept in a sub-jail within Dhaka Cantonment.

Prosecutor Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim said the officers were arrested

support for the judicial process. They have kept that commitment," he said.

He warned all against spreading misinformation about the patriotic armed forces.

Replying to a query, Tajul said that under the amended ICT law, the accused are no longer in active service once formal charges are pressed.

Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman, a victim of enforced disappearance, talked to journalists outside the tribunal. He urged the government to form a commission to probe how top military officers managed to flee despite cancelled passports and cantonment restrictions.

Arman, son of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mir Quasem Ali, also called for oversight to ensure those detained in cantonments are held under the jail code and cannot communicate with serving personnel.

"My hope as a victim is that patriotic members of the army will never again be used as tools of hired killing or made to stand against the people they are meant to protect," he said. "This trial will ensure that."

SUB-JAIL

The government on October 12 declared MES (Military Engineering Service) building number 54, located north of Bashir Road in Dhaka Cantonment, as a temporary jail under the provisions of the Prisoners Act, 1984. The sub-jail, prepared for the 15 army officers, is also called the Visiting Senior Officers' Quarters (VSOQ).

Sources from the prisons directorate confirmed that the 15 army officers had not been kept at the facility until the court ordered the authorities to send them to jail.

The VSOQ "mess" comprises small serviced apartments, according to those who had resided there.

Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Syed Md Motaher Hossain said that the individual rooms have been turned into cells by fitting them with grilles needed to turn the rooms into "lock-ups".

According to the Jail Code, prisoners are kept locked in their cells from sundown.

When asked if they will each get "division" status, which allows them each a room of their own, Brig Gen Motaher said that all commissioned officers get "division" status in jail.

"These quarters had two rooms or single rooms, and we modified them according to the security arrangements of the Jail Code," he said.

The boundary walls of the compound have been reinforced. CCTV cameras have also been installed.

The officers were searched upon entry into the sub-jail and they will not have access to communication devices.

by cantonment police under tribunal warrants. "They were brought in a prison bus with a forwarding report from the police that proves they were arrested by the police."

He also said police probably made the arrests on Tuesday.

Asked about the prosecution's claim, defence counsel Sarwar insisted the army officers surrendered themselves before the tribunal, and since the surrender took place under police escort, the prosecution wrongly termed them arrested.

Tajul thanked law enforcement and the army for executing arrest orders.

He said the Bangladesh Army, whom he described as "guardians of national sovereignty", cooperated in executing the court's arrest orders.

"They had pledged respect for the law of the land and expressed full

teacher duties related to election training and preparations, urging that the directive be suspended immediately.

The EC plans to finalise the panel of polling officials by October 30.

A circular issued on September 2 instructed district election officers to prepare lists of presiding, assistant presiding and polling officers with recruits from government offices, private institutions, schools, colleges, banks and insurance firms.

The BNP also proposed that expatriates' voting rights through postal ballots be exercised with full transparency and that the list of registered expatriate voters willing to vote by postal ballot in different countries be provided to political parties well ahead of time.

The party is seeking the cancellation of all contractual appointments in embassies and election-related government, semi-government and autonomous bodies.

The letter also calls for immediate and effective steps to recover illegal arms across the country and to stop the entry of illegal weapons, fake currency and black money through the borders.

The document further said all

firearms distributed on political consideration during the tenure of the past government must be submitted before the announcement of the election schedule.

It will also seek strict presence of the military, BGB, Rab, police and other law enforcement agencies at every polling centre at least one week before the polls.

The BNP will propose that, alongside administrative officials, the EC appoint competent, honest and experienced officers from its own Election Service cadre as returning officers, where possible.

It also suggested giving the EC's own officials magisterial powers to strengthen election management and accountability.

The document recommended that, with the announcement of the election schedule, a Complaint Redress Centre be set up at each district election office and at every upazila or thana election office across the country.

Any form of violence or terrorist activity must be immediately suppressed not only within a 400-yard radius of polling centres but also anywhere in the constituency, the document said.

According to sources from yesterday's meeting, it was broadly agreed that the order would be based on the July 18th itself.

As per the preliminary draft, the implementation process will begin with the issuing of a special order,

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all as he heads a neutral, caretaker-style government.

"Necessary reshuffles should be made wherever needed before the election," Taher said.

In response to their demand, the chief adviser told Jamaat leaders that he would personally supervise the matter and make transfers through a lottery system.

"We said we had no objection to that. You can hold a lottery, but make sure no unseen 'influence' is there," Taher said.

The Election Commission has not yet announced an official date for the national polls. However, it is preparing to hold the election in the first half of February, in line with the chief adviser's announcement following his meeting with BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman in London in June, and his televised address on August 5 marking the first anniversary of the July uprising.

Jamaat leaders during yesterday's meeting also discussed the July charter implementation process with Yunus.

They said the July National Charter must be granted legitimacy through an executive order. "We have consistently said that if it is legally sound, then the chief adviser should issue the order, not the president. Everyone knows whose product this president is," Taher said.

He said that the charter is not constitution. "It is an extra constitutional arrangement, which any government has the authority to issue when faced with such a situation. And the chief adviser agreed that this should be done through an order."

The order will serve as the basis for

Amnesty hails move to try army officers for torture, abduction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International in a statement issued yesterday welcomed the decision by the Bangladeshi authorities to bring 15 serving army officers before a court to face charges under the International Crimes Tribunal.

"This marks the first instance in which military personnel have been formally charged in connection with enforced disappearances in Bangladesh, representing a significant step towards accountability and

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a referendum. We've made this position very clear. We believe the chief adviser has been convinced by our argument" Taher said.

The Jamaat leader also thanked BNP for agreeing on the referendum issue.

"However, they are now trying to complicate the matter by insisting that the referendum and the national election must be held the same day. These are two entirely separate processes," Taher said.

"Since BNP did not originally support the referendum, they agreed only under public pressure. But now they've added a twist. In the meeting, we made it clear that we don't accept any such twist. The referendum must be held first, in a simple and straightforward manner."

He said they did not discuss the caretaker government issue for two reasons. First, the issue is still under hearing in the Supreme Court. Once the SC delivers its ruling, they will bring the caretaker issue into the discussion accordingly.

"We believe the current government is interim and should remain so. If the Supreme Court's order does not contradict this, then this government will continue to play the role of a caretaker government," Taher said.

In a press statement, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing quoted Taher as saying in the meeting, "The referendum must be held before the national election because the July charter contains many issues linked to the national polls."

Taher also said, "If the referendum and the national election are held the same day, there is a risk that the voting process will be prolonged."

Reconstitute EC

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raise questions about the commission's impartiality and sense of justice."

The government had assured them of measures to create a neutral environment and a level playing field for all parties, he added.

The NCP also questioned the neutrality of recent administrative transfers and postings, alleging that ministries were being divided among political groups with support from within the advisory council.

Regarding student advisers in the government, Nahid said they represented the July uprising and not any political party.

"If student advisers are seen as political representatives, the same should apply to other advisers with political backgrounds," he said.

About the July charter, Nahid said the party would sign it only after receiving guarantees of its implementation.

"It is not enough to sign a document -- there must be a constitutional order to ensure execution. And only Dr Yunus whose legitimacy stems from the July uprising -- can issue it."

The caretaker issue could only be addressed after a referendum, as specified in the charter.

"Those calling for it now might have other motives," he said.

Nahid added that the government had promised to review the NCP's proposals after receiving the National Commission's recommendations.

"We believe both the Election Commission and the advisory council must demonstrate neutrality and competence for a fair election. Without that, neither reform nor justice can be achieved," he added.

It will also seek strict presence of the military, BGB, Rab, police and other law enforcement agencies at every polling centre at least one week before the polls.

Another such meeting will be held this afternoon, following an