

Memorial meeting for Ahmad Rafique today

CITY DESK

A condolence meeting commemorating Ahmad Rafique, a Language Movement veteran, will be held around 3:30pm today at the Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad Auditorium of Bangla Academy in Dhaka, said a press release.

Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, convener of the national committee for the condolence meeting, will preside over the programme.

Ahmad Rafique, a renowned cultural activist, Tagore exponent, poet, essayist and columnist, passed away at Dhaka's BIRDEM Hospital on October 1. He was 96.

BGCS now Jatiyo Chhatro Shokti

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just eight months after its formation, Bangladesh Gontantrik Chhatra Sangsads (BGCS) has been dissolved and reconstituted under a new name "Jatiyo Chhatro Shokti".

The announcement was made yesterday during a national coordination meeting at the Abu Sayed Convention Hall in Dhaka, with BGCS Convener Abu Baker Mojumdar unveiling the change.

Present at the event were Akhter Hossen, member secretary of NCP; Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser for the southern region; Sarjis Alam, chief organiser for the northern region; Ariful Islam Adib, senior joint convener; Zahid Ahsan, member secretary; and other key organisers.

BGCS was originally formed on February 26 this year by a faction of leaders from the anti-discrimination student movement.



Locals form a human chain on the bank of the Gangadhar river in Kurigram yesterday, demanding the construction of a permanent embankment to protect their homes and farmlands from erosion that has already devoured areas stretching nearly two kilometres at Dhanirampur and Madhya Dhanirampur villages.

UPRISING CASE
Police seek to clear Iresh Zaker, ex-cabinet secy Mahbub

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Police have sought to clear marketing professional and actor Iresh Zaker of charges in a case filed over the killing of BNP activist Mahfuz Alam Shraban, linked to the July uprising.

Iresh, listed as accused number 157, was found to have no evidence connecting him to the incident, said investigation officer Sazzad Roman, inspector of Mirpur Model Police Station.

Police have also moved to clear former cabinet secretary Mahbub Hossain and Bangladesh Insurance Forum President BM Yousuf Ali in the same case. The IO has also appealed to the court to relieve 16 other accused.

They include Forethought PR Managing Director Ikram Moin Chowdhury, Popular Life Insurance Company Ltd Additional Managing Director BM Shawkat Ali, and Tiger IT Chairman Ziaur Rahman.

Sazzad filed three interim investigation reports with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court between October 9 and 16.

"In the primary investigation, no evidence was found linking them to the incident, so they have been exempted," he said, citing the report.

The case was filed by Shraban's brother on March 27, accusing ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 406 others of involvement in Shraban's killing in Mirpur on August 5 last year.

Iresh's inclusion in the case had sparked widespread criticism, with many netizens highlighting his active role in the uprising.

The accused include 24 journalists, at least 36 former ministers and state ministers, more than 41 former AL lawmakers, six former advisers to Hasina, businesspersons, lawyers, doctors, and police.

Caretaker system scrapped under a pre-planned design
Says Jamaat lawyer at SC hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir yesterday told the Supreme Court that a dictatorial and totalitarian regime had been established in the country through the cancellation of the non-party caretaker government system.

"Due to this dictatorial regime, Bangladesh has gone through a major disaster in all aspects of politics, economy and social policy. The non-party caretaker government system is the most acceptable formula for democracy as it is possible to hold free, fair, impartial and credible elections under such a government," he said.

The lawyer made the remarks while placing arguments before a seven-member bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, during the third day's hearing of the appeals and review petitions against its 2011 verdict that scrapped the non-party caretaker government system.

The apex court fixed October 28 for resuming the hearing.

Arguing for restoring the caretaker government system, Shishir Manir told the court that the system cannot be effectively implemented during the period of the current interim government as the parliament is not functional now.

Yesterday, Manir told the court that the caretaker government system was scrapped as part of a completely pre-planned design, although the parliamentary committee concerned at that time had not wanted to exclude the system.

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He said whatever verdict the Appellate Division delivers in this case should conform with the July charter's proposals on the caretaker government system. Otherwise, the total reform process will be affected and lost, he added.

Earlier in the day, Barrister Ehsan A Siddiqi, the lawyer for rights body Law, Governance and Policy, an intervener of the case, told the SC that the 13th amendment, which had introduced the caretaker system in 1996, is a basic structure of the constitution and a constitutional convention as it has strengthened the democracy of the country through holding free, fair and credible elections.

The elections held under the otherwise governments were questionable and therefore, the caretaker government system cannot be removed.

A seven-judge full bench of the Appellate Division, headed by the then Chief Justice ABM Kairul Haque, had declared by a majority view on May 10, 2011, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution null and void.

Two govt ambulances sit idle in Habiganj

Patients forced to pay double for private service

MINTU DESHWARA

Critically ill patients in Habiganj are being forced to pay high fares to private ambulance operators for emergency transfers to Sylhet or Dhaka, while two government ambulances meant to serve them sit idle and in disrepair.

Aslam Uddin, a resident of Habiganj town, said he had to pay nearly double the normal fare to take his ailing mother from Habiganj Sadar Hospital to Dhaka in a private ambulance after failing to get a government one.

"I'm not alone -- this is happening to many families here," he added.

Families say they often have no choice but to pay Tk 6,000-7,500 for a Dhaka trip, despite the official government rate being Tk 3,900.

Every day, an estimated 10 to 15 patients leave Habiganj 250-bed District Hospital for advanced treatment in Sylhet or Dhaka. But most depend on private ambulances, as the hospital's two government vehicles -- one received in 2009 and another in 2017 -- have become nearly unusable.

A hospital official, seeking anonymity, said one vehicle

is "almost permanently at the workshop", while the other runs intermittently. Drivers often refuse to operate the old ambulance, the official said.

Private ambulance businesses, however, are thriving.

Abdullah, a local operator, said they charge Tk 6,500-7,500 for

"The Dhaka-Sylhet highway is in bad shape, and these ambulances can't handle long-distance trips. Sometimes we have to turn patients away because the vehicles aren't roadworthy," he said.

Dr Amitul Haque Sarkar, superintendent of Habiganj District Hospital, said he has been

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Dhaka and Tk 3,000-4,000 for Sylhet, depending on the vehicle model. Each of their ambulances earns Tk 40,000-50,000 a month.

Abdur Rouf, one of the government ambulance drivers, said both vehicles are old and frequently break down.

appealing for replacements since his posting two and a half years ago.

"Both ambulances are in terrible condition due to age, but we try to serve as many patients as possible. I've repeatedly requested new vehicles from higher authorities, but none have arrived yet," he added.

They shot at me while I hung

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shop, said that after Friday prayers on July 19, he left the shop for home. "As I crossed the small bridge over the Rampura canal and got onto the main road, I saw police and BGB members firing on protesting students and people," he told the tribunal.

"Out of fear, I climbed to the roof of a nearby under-construction building,

Three policemen followed me to the fourth floor. I held onto a rod at the edge of the roof and tried to hang there. One of them ordered me to jump off. As I did not comply, the policeman fired three rounds at me. All three bullets hit my legs. Then another policeman fired three more rounds -- those bullets also struck both my legs," he said.

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