

Dhaka voices displeasure over Hasina's interviews

Summons Indian envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday expressed displeasure over the interviews of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina published by Indian media outlets.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally conveyed Dhaka's displeasure to New Delhi by summoning Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka Pawan Badhe, a senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told UNB.

Officials reportedly conveyed that harbouring a fugitive currently under trial for crimes against humanity and granting her a platform to "spread hatred and advocate terrorist acts inside Bangladesh" is detrimental to fostering a constructive bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The Indian diplomat was asked to convey to New Delhi Bangladesh's request to stop Hasina's access to media, said a diplomatic source.

The AFP, Reuters and the Independent (UK) also interviewed Hasina recently.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus speaks to Senator Salma Ataulhajan, who is leading a seven-member Canadian parliamentary delegation currently visiting Bangladesh. The photo was taken yesterday at the State Guest House Jamuna.

PHOTO: PTD

Bangladesh gearing up for 'historic' polls

Yunus tells Canadian parliamentary delegation

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday told a visiting Canadian parliamentary delegation that Bangladesh is preparing for a national election, which he described as a "historic moment" for the country.

"You've come at a time when Bangladesh is undergoing a significant transformation, [after] an uprising led by young people. Now we're preparing for an election, which will be a historic moment for the nation," he said when Canadian Senator Salma Ataulhajan, and two MPs Salma Zahid and Sameer Zuberi called on him at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

Both sides discussed ways to strengthen trade and address the Rohingya crisis. Yunus briefed them on the ongoing reforms and preparations for the February polls and thanked Canada for its support to the displaced Rohingya.

"Eight years have passed. The return of the Rohingya people to their homeland is the only viable solution; there is no alternative. Around 1.2 million [Rohingya] people are living here... Now we're facing financial cuts, which make this crisis even graver," Yunus said.

Senator Ataulhajan reaffirmed Canada's commitment to supporting the displaced community, according to the chief adviser's press wing.

Dissecting the July charter flashpoints

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BNP has already sounded a warning that it would reject anything beyond the charter, clarifying that the notes of dissent must not be done away with.

The two other prominent parties – Jamaat-e-Islami and NCP – favour excluding the dissenting notes from the referendum.

The July National Charter mentions that it would be up to the discretion of the parties, if they won the people's mandate, whether to act on their notes of dissent.

However, when submitting its recommendations for the implementation, the consensus commission dropped the dissenting notes.

During the consensus talks, BNP registered notes of dissent on at least nine issues; there were more than 25 dissenting notes from other parties.

BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed has said the charter was signed at a historic event and includes some notes of dissent from different political parties.

"We still stand by that position and have not deviated from the signed charter," he said.

In its recommendations regarding the charter implementation, the consensus commission pitched two alternatives for the referendum question. Both ask essentially the same question – whether voters agree to 48 proposals that deal with constitutional changes.

However, none of those proposals had any mention of the notes of dissent.

When asked why the notes of dissent had been dropped, commission member Badiul Alam Majumdar told this newspaper yesterday that during the discussions, there were views both for and against the issues. However, the decision was made to go with the overwhelming majority.

"Notes of dissent were included in the July charter to keep the records straight. But at the time of the referendum, only the decisions must be presented before the people," he explained.

BNP'S DISSENT

BNP and its allies dissented to a

proposal for an upper house based on proportional representation of votes. Instead, they supported forming the upper house according to each party's share of seats in the lower house.

While most parties agreed that the constitution could be amended through a two-thirds majority in the lower house and a simple majority in the upper house, BNP was against it, saying that the upper house need not vote on it since the representatives were not directly elected.

The parties, except BNP and its allies, agreed that a party chief should not be eligible to serve as prime minister at the same time.

Most of the parties have agreed that lawmakers be allowed to vote across party lines, except on no-confidence motions and finance bills. BNP's note of dissent on this point adds that the exception extends to national security during war and constitutional amendments.

According to the July charter, a five-member panel comprising the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, the speaker (the lower house) and the deputy speaker (from the opposition), and a representative of the second-largest opposition party will be formed to pick chief adviser, of a caretaker government, from a pool of nominees.

The panel will invite parties with representation in parliament as well as those registered with the EC, and independent MPs to propose names of individuals qualified to serve as chief adviser. Each party and independent MP may propose one name.

The panel will deliberate on the proposed individuals through its own enquiries. From among eligible citizens, one individual will be selected as chief adviser of the caretaker government.

If this first option fails, both the ruling party and the opposition will put forward five nominees each. The second-largest opposition party will put forward two.

The ruling party will select one from the main opposition's list, and vice versa. The two parties will also pick one nominee from the second-largest party's list. At this point, four out of

five panel votes will suffice to select a chief adviser from the short list.

If the second option also fails, two judges – one from the Appellate Division and one from the High Court Division – will join the panel. The seven-member panel will then vote on the shortlisted nominees to select the chief adviser.

Several parties, including BNP, submitted notes of dissent on the inclusion of two judges and the voting option.

A majority of the parties agreed that the president should have the authority to appoint the chiefs of National Human Rights Commission, the Information Commission, Bangladesh Press Council, Law Commission, and Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission and the governor of Bangladesh Bank.

BNP objected in the case of the energy regulatory commission and the head of the central bank.

Parties also agreed that the most senior judge of the Appellate Division, based on their service duration, be appointed the chief justice.

BNP dissented, saying that its election manifesto will include the option of appointing one of the two most senior judges.

It also issued a note of dissent on the process of appointing the ombudsman and public service commission and the comptroller and auditor general.

The party has said, on several occasions, that appointments to these vital institutions be regulated by law.

ORDER AND REFERENDUM
Both Jamaat and NCP favour an implementation order to grant the charter a legal recognition. And the NCP specifically wants the chief adviser, not the president, to issue it.

BNP opposes a constitutional order for implementation of the charter.

On the referendum timing, the party insists it should be held on the same day as the national election, while Jamaat is demanding that it be held before the polls.

Jamaat, along with several like-minded parties, has already launched street protests calling for the referendum to be held in November.

Govt readies a package to appease all

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address the nation this afternoon. The speech will be broadcast live on Bangladesh Television, BTV News, and BTV World, according to the chief adviser's press wing.

Asked yesterday about implementing constitutional reforms under the charter, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan said, "We need to keep pace with the times, so the advisory council will hold discussions and reach decisions as quickly as possible."

Contacted on Monday, Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan said, "We are waiting for the political parties' decision. If we don't get it, we will make a decision on November 13 [today]."

Amid raging disagreements over the timing of the referendum, the charter implementation order, and the dissenting notes, the government on November 3 urged the political parties to resolve their differences and reach a unified decision within a week.

It said otherwise it will "act as necessary". However, the parties remained divided till yesterday.

On the referendum timing, BNP insists it should be held on the same day as the election, while Jamaat-e-Islami wants it earlier.

Jamaat and allies have already launched protests over their five-point demand, including holding the

referendum this month and issuing an implementation order for the July charter.

They yesterday warned of an indefinite sit-in until the demands are met.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference at Al Falah Auditorium in the capital's Moghbazar following a meeting at his party office yesterday, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar said, "We want to solve the issues through discussion. We asked for an appointment with the chief adviser. After meeting him, if our demands aren't fulfilled, we'll begin an indefinite sit-in in front of his residence [State Guest House Jamuna]."

National Citizen Party Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary expressed solidarity with Jamaat over its demand for a July charter implementation order.

Both parties want an order to give the charter legal recognition, with NCP specifically demanding that the chief adviser, rather than the president, issue it.

Meanwhile, BNP demands keeping the notes of dissent in the implementation process, while both Jamaat and NCP prefer that the notes be excluded.

The July National Charter, signed by 25 parties including the BNP and Jamaat on October 17, states that any party or alliance submitting

dissenting views must include them in its manifesto and may act on them if it wins the polls.

Submitting its recommendations on the charter implementation on October 28, the National Consensus Commission dropped the section on dissent.

Various parties issued the dissenting notes on over 25 of the 48 constitutional reform proposals during the consensus talks.

BNP alone did so on at least nine issues. It opposed a constitutional order for the charter's implementation.

The party also rejected the proposal that if the reform council fails to complete reforms within 270 days of its first sitting, the reform bill, once approved by referendum, would automatically be inserted into the constitution.

It termed the idea "wholly irrational, politically motivated, and absurd," saying no bill can become law without parliamentary passage and presidential assent.

Speaking virtually at a discussion marking the National Revolution and Solidarity Day at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman said, "Our position is very clear: the commitments made in the July charter, which we signed, will be fully upheld by BNP, and we remain strongly committed to fulfilling them."

Faruk, Robin got Tk 2 lakh

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four days.

According to police, Faruk and Robin were the two gunmen seen in the CCTV footage firing multiple rounds at Mamun near the hospital gate.

Following the murder, members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police conducted drives in different areas of Dhaka and Narsingdi on Tuesday night and apprehended five suspects.

In a press conference at the DMP media centre yesterday, the DB chief Shafiqul Islam said Mamun was killed over control of Dhaka's criminal underworld. "The murder was executed on the instructions of Roni,

an associate of notorious underworld figure Sanjidul Islam Emon."

The DB chief said eight to nine members of Emon's gang had positioned themselves near the court area on the day of the killing to ensure the attack's success.

"Kamal, a member of Emon's gang, monitored Mamun's movement and tipped off Faruk and Robin. Upon receiving the signal, they fired several shots to ensure Mamun's death."

"After the attack, the shooters fled through the Beribadh area to Rayerbazar, where, on Roni's orders, Rubel took the firearms and ammunition and handed them to Yousuf. Rubel later gave Tk 1 lakh each to Faruk and Robin.

"The gang then attempted to flee the country. They first travelled to Sylhet to cross over to India and failed. Later, they planned to cross the border through Sathkhira."

While returning to Dhaka from Sylhet, Faruk, Robin, Shamim and Rubel were detained in Narsingdi's Velanagar. At that time, Tk 1.5 lakh was recovered from their possession.

Meanwhile, Yousuf, a tailor by profession, was apprehended from Rayerbazar, and two foreign-made pistols, six rounds of ammunition and two magazines were found under the floor of his home.

The DB official added that the group had previously made multiple attempts to kill Mamun.

Tension rises

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state witness, the first such instance since the tribunal's formation in 2010.

Asked during a media briefing on Tuesday if the recent attacks would affect the trial process, prosecutor Mizanul Islam said, "I do not think so. But I can say that what they are doing is to create obstacles."

ARSON, CRUDE BOMB EXPLOSIONS

Despite the heightened security, several arson and crude bomb attacks were reported in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Brahmanbaria yesterday.

In Brahmanbaria, unidentified miscreants set fire to a single-storey Grameen Bank branch in Bijoynagar upazila around 2:00am. The fire burned furniture and important documents, Md Kalim Uddin, the branch manager, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, arson targeting vehicles continued in and around the capital. An Alif Paribahan bus was set on fire in Ashulia's Sarkar Market area around 4:30am, said Ashulia Police Station OC Abdul Hannan.

Shortly after, at 4:50am, a Banasree Paribahan bus was torched in the Beraider Chala area of Gazipur's Sreepur, according to fire service. This was followed by an attack at 5:10am on a VIP Paribahan bus in the Bhogra Bypass area of Gazipur. Later, a microbus was set on fire on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Uttara around 7:10am, said fire service duty officer Rozina Akter.

The attacks continued into the afternoon. A bus of Shatabdi Paribahan was set on fire in front of Mirpur New Market around 1:45pm, confirmed Shah Ali Police Station OC Mohammad Golam Azam. Around 6:40pm, a local bus was torched in Dholaiapur.

Around 9:30pm, miscreants set fire to a train coach in Dhaka's Tejgaon. Locals caught two individuals – Morshed, 40, and Zakir, 25, – and handed them over to police, said acting OC Zainal Abedin of Dhaka Railway Police.

The fire was brought under control before the fire service arrived at the scene, he said, adding that the train was stationary at Tejgaon Railway Station when the incident occurred.

Around the same time, a crude bomb exploded at Harun Mollah Ground in Pallabi while a documentary on the "fascist regime" was being screened. No one was injured in the attack.

Another crude bomb blast was reported in front of Fortune Shopping Mall in the Mouchak area, police said.

Meanwhile, two incidents of crude bomb explosion near the TSC area of Dhaka University injured at least three people. The incidents caused panic in the area and disrupted a documentary screening.

DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said two female residents of Ruqayyah Hall were slightly injured in one of the blasts. An official of the Madrasa Education Department, Jahangir Alam Chakladar,

also sustained injuries.

In a separate incident in the same area, a cocktail explosion damaged a motorcycle.

A tea stall owner near the scene said explosives were hurled from across the road near Suhrawardy Udayan. Eyewitnesses reported that two cocktails were thrown from inside the park.

ARRESTS, BOMB RECOVERIES
Meanwhile, several arrests were made yesterday.

The DMP, in a press release yesterday morning, said that its Detective Branch had arrested 44 members of AL from different areas of the capital in the preceding 24 hours.

In Narayanganj, police arrested at least 29 leaders and activists of AL and its affiliated bodies during special drives from midnight Tuesday to yesterday evening, said Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime) Tarek Al Mehedi.

Separately, police arrested three people with "a large quantity" of crude bombs, petrol bombs, and bomb-making materials from a house in Bhanga upazila, said Bhanga Police Station OC Mohammad Ashraf Hossain.

Meanwhile, Rab recovered six petrol bombs and four crude bombs from the Rayerbazar Graveyard in Mohammadpur in the evening. According to a Rab-2 press release, no arrests had been made in connection with the recovery.

Maersk's APM

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The interim government has also progressed towards appointing the UAE-based DP World to run its largest terminal, the NCT, and preparing to sign agreements with PSA Singapore and DP World to build two terminals of the port's Bay Terminal respectively.

The protesters criticised the government's move to appoint foreign operators without competitive tenders, a practice often deployed by the ousted Awami League government.

At the beginning of this month, the Chattogram district unit of Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) observed a token hunger strike opposing the construction of the LCT.

The SKOP said the Laldia Char is close to the Karnaphuli estuary and the establishment of a terminal with jetties there would eventually render the existing port jetties ineffective.

APM Terminals, with its experience of operations in China, Singapore and Sri Lanka, will introduce operational excellence to Bangladesh, helping make the country's logistics sector future-ready in the post-LDC era, said Ashik Chowdhury, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and CEO of the PPP Authority.

"The newest green port will accommodate large container vessels, reduce per-unit freight cost and

enable direct shipping connectivity worldwide," he said at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy announcing the plan to sign the deal.

The project will generate a stable foreign-currency income stream for Bangladesh while minimising public capital expenditure, said the Chief Adviser's Office in a summary shared with the media after the briefing.

Additionally, for the first time in Bangladesh, round-the-clock port operations with night navigation capabilities for ships with permissible length and draught will be enabled, it added.

The LCT will be implemented on a Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) basis for a period of 48 years comprising an initial 33-year concession with a possible 15-year extension, according to CCEA meeting.

It will take approximately three years to complete the construction and commissioning of the terminal, which is expected to begin operations by the end of 2029.

APM Terminals is expected to bring in foreign investments of about \$550 million or Tk 6,700 crore – the single largest European equity investment in Bangladesh to date, Chowdhury said.

Upon the finalisation of the agreement, APM Terminals has also committed to paying a signing bonus of Tk 250 crore to Bangladesh.

Located about five kilometres closer to the Bay of Bengal compared to the NCT, the LCT will be capable of handling ships nearly twice the size of those currently accommodated at the NCT, decreasing dependence on transshipment ports like Colombo and Singapore, said the CA office.

The terminal's initial annual handling capacity will be 800,000 TEUs, scalable to 1 million TEUs through efficiency gains and technology upgrades.

Officials estimate this will increase the country's total container handling capacity by more than 40 percent, according to the CA Office.

This will help relieve the current level of congestion at Chattogram's existing container terminals and provide headroom for Bangladesh's fast-growing trade volumes, it added.

"This terminal has the potential to dramatically reduce the 'factory-to-store' time for Bangladeshi products," said CPA Chairman SM Moniruzzaman.

Under the revenue-sharing arrangement, APM Terminals will pay the CPA \$21 per TEU for the first 800,000 containers handled annually, according to Ashik.

The LCT is expected to create 500 to 700 direct jobs, with additional employment across the logistics and related sectors.