

Health assistants start work stoppage

Demand grade upgradation
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Health Assistant Association began an indefinite work stoppage at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital yesterday to press home its six-point demand, including upgrading their post to the 14th grade.

Several thousand health assistants started the sit-in in the morning and will stay overnight at the Shaheed Minar, said Fazlul Haque Chowdhury, member secretary of the Bangladesh Health Assistant Association Central Coordination Council.

On November 23, the association announced it would go for a work stoppage if its demands were not met by November 28.

Health assistants are frontline public health workers, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas. They conduct routine vaccination sessions, among other responsibilities.

The association has long been demanding amendments to the recruitment rules, removal of salary discrimination and the granting of technical status, among six demands.

They observed work abstention in early October to press home the same demands but withdrew following assurances from the authorities.



Members of the Bangladesh Health Assistant Association stage a daylong sit-in at the capital's Central Shaheed Minar yesterday to press home their six-point demand, including upgrading their post to the 14th grade.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Corbyn's new party gathers amid fight for UK left

AFP, Liverpool

Veteran British socialist Jeremy Corbyn called for his new political party to "come together" as he opened its inaugural conference yesterday, as it seeks to move on from a messy launch and become a viable left-wing challenger to Labour.

As British politics fractures into a multi-party system and Prime Minister Keir Starmer takes Labour rightward on some issues, Corbyn's outfit hopes to fill a gap on the left.

"We're here today to do something dramatic...to found a new Democratic Socialist Party in Britain that can challenge power in our society," Corbyn told the conference in the northwestern English city of Liverpool.

But the ex-Labour leader acknowledged the new party needs to get past its internal differences.

"As a party, we've got to come together and be united because division and disunity will not serve the interests of the people that we want to represent," he said.

The appeal for unity comes after a rocky start for "Your Party", which Corbyn and fellow ex-Labour lawmaker Zarah Sultana announced they were forming in July.

TROOP KILLING IN WASHINGTON US halts all asylum decisions

AFP, Washington

The United States is freezing all asylum decisions, officials said Friday, as President Donald Trump hardens his anti-migrant stance after an Afghan national allegedly shot two National Guard members this week in Washington.

Wednesday's attack on the soldiers -- one of whom died from her injuries -- has ignited a fresh crackdown on foreigners in the United States, with Trump also pledging to suspend migration from "third world countries."

Joseph Edlow, director of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), said his agency has "halted all asylum decisions until we can ensure that every alien is vetted and screened to the maximum degree possible."

That followed Trump's announcement late Thursday of plans to "permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries to allow the US system to fully recover."

Asked which nationalities would be affected, the Department of Homeland Security pointed AFP to a list of 19 countries -- including Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Iran and Myanmar -- already facing US travel restrictions since June.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that the US had temporarily stopped issuing visas to all individuals traveling on Afghan passports.

"The United States has no higher priority than protecting our nation and our people," he said.

The shooting has brought together three politically explosive issues: Trump's controversial use of the military on American soil, immigration, and the lingering legacy of the 20-year conflict in Afghanistan.

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Rahmanullah Lakanwal, 29, who allegedly opened fire on the guardsmen just a few blocks from the White House, had been part of a CIA-backed "partner force" fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

He entered the United States as part of a resettlement program following the American military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Jeanine Pirro, the US attorney for Washington DC, said Friday that Lakanwal would be charged with murder over the attack.

Sarah Beckstrom, a 20-year-old West

Virginia National Guard member deployed in the US capital as part of what Trump called a crackdown on crime, died from her wounds.

The second injured soldier, 24-year-old Andrew Wolfe, was "fighting for his life," Pirro told the Fox News program Fox & Friends.

Attorney General Pam Bondi has pledged to seek the death penalty against Lakanwal, describing him as a "monster."

In his social media post Thursday, Trump also threatened to reverse "millions" of admissions granted under his predecessor Joe Biden, in a new escalation of his anti-immigration stance.

Separately, the USCIS said it would reexamine the green cards -- permanent residency cards -- issued to individuals who had migrated to the US from the same 19 countries also cited by the Department of Homeland Security.

More than 1.6 million green card holders, roughly 12 percent of the total permanent resident population, were born in the countries listed, according to US immigration data analyzed by AFP.

Afghanistan has over 116,000 green card holders.

Shawn VanDiver, president of AfghanEvac, a group that helped resettle Afghans in the country after the military withdrawal, blasted Rubio's move to halt all visa issuances.

Voter confidence

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run-up to the polls. They observed that political consensus has not been reached fully yet, which may influence the election outcome.

He said several critical issues remain unresolved, including updating the voter list, determining the number of polling booths and ensuring voting rights for expatriate Bangladeshis.

"People expect the government to play a stronger and politically neutral role," he said.

On law enforcement agencies, he said citizens want police, administration and the military to operate independently and effectively.

"The election is very close. If existing problems are not addressed immediately, the situation may worsen. The government must recognise this," he said.

Speaking at the consultation, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said, "While sitting in Dhaka, we hear the concerns of people from Dhaka. We learn about their experiences. However, we must listen more to those who live outside the capital -- women and men in rural areas, the youth, the marginalised and excluded communities. We must understand what they think and the realities they face."

She said ordinary citizens, particularly marginalised people, were openly expressing their opinions in the meeting.

"They are sharing their thoughts, concerns and expectations regarding the upcoming election. The most important thing is that they have now become aware of their rights and are expressing them without

hesitation."

Citizens, teachers, researchers, lawyers, representatives of political parties, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, professionals and members of marginalised communities from across Rangpur took part in the meeting.

Participants discussed the election around three core questions: what will guide their voting decisions in the 13th national election, what they expect from the Election Commission to ensure credible polls and their primary demands from the next elected government.

Key issues raised included establishing the rule of law, women's empowerment, improving living standards, ensuring freedom of expression, building a corruption-free state, improving education quality, strengthening the EC and increasing citizen participation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Responding to journalists' questions, Debapriya said the concerns of marginalised and disadvantaged groups remain underrepresented in electoral discussions. To address this, he said Citizen's Platform is preparing a "Citizen Manifesto" that will prioritise opinions collected from grassroots stakeholders.

Citizen's Platform Fellow Professor Mostafizur Rahman and several researchers were present at the event.

Previously, Citizen's Platform held similar consultations in Sylhet on October 23, Rajshahi on November 15, Barishal on November 19, Khulna on November 20 and Mymensingh on November 24.

Education in Bangla

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wrote with such clarity that one could easily agree or disagree with him. "But many modern writers are so unclear that it is difficult even to understand what they mean."

At the event, The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam thanked everyone present. He expressed special gratitude to the teachers and students of Khulna University.

He also urged everyone to read the works of Abul Mansur Ahmad.

Poet Imran Mahfuz said the Abul Mansur Ahmad Memorial Council has identified 52 young scholars in seven years through competitions and seminars to introduce his ideas to new generations.

In his welcome remarks, writer and teacher Abul Fazal said although "British Bengal" was divided in 1947, "historical Bengal -- and its culture -- was not."

Dr Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, professor of Environmental Science at Khulna University, chaired the event.

Rab-15 CO among 300 transferred

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Khan, who previously commanded 37 Bir under the 55 Infantry Division in Jashore during the Covid-19 period.

Wing Commander MZM Intekhab Chowdhury, director of Rab's media wing, said a probe committee had been formed to investigate allegations linked to drug seizures, financial misappropriation, and controversial operations. "Those found guilty will be brought to justice. No one will be spared," he said.

He added that parts of the media reports contain truth and are under investigation, and that offenders could face

dismissal or imprisonment, depending on the findings.

He, however, described recent media reports as a "mixed-up jumble", saying some outlets had conflated two separate issues -- the annual reshuffle and the ongoing investigations -- in a way that distorted facts and damaged Rab's reputation.

He said the allegations date back to September and that old incidents had resurfaced ahead of the election.

"If misappropriation occurred -- whether involving 10, 20, or even 100 officers -- it is impossible that 300 personnel would collectively hold meetings over it. Such large-scale

misappropriation is unrealistic," he said.

Officials familiar with the matter said headquarters launched a special probe in recent months following a series of allegations against Rab-15 after controversial drives.

On September 7, Rab-15 claimed to have arrested two women with 89,600 yaba pills and Tk 16.71 lakh in West Kutupalong of Ukhiya. Allegations later emerged that the seizure was underreported in case documents.

On September 26, Rab-15 arrested alleged top drug trader Jahangir Alam in Leda of Hnila union, Teknaf; the seizure

list -- seven bricks and two wooden sticks -- drew widespread criticism.

In another recent allegation, an officer from the Kutupalong Rab camp reportedly raided a house, seized Tk 60 lakh in cash and four lakh yaba pills, and then shared the seized items among themselves.

Sources also said certain officers in Cox's Bazar routinely used plainclothes "FS operatives" or "civil teams", similar to police intelligence units, and that some of these teams allegedly maintained links with yaba traders, facilitated smugglers, brokered settlements, and shared illicit profits.

Jamaat sees unrest

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about Allah and the Prophet (PBUH), hurting the religious sentiments of the country's Muslim majority. It said the government was forced to arrest him amid mounting public protests.

The Shura also strongly urged the government to accept the five-point demands of the eight like-minded parties, including Jamaat, and take concrete steps to ensure an environment for a free, fair, impartial, and participatory election.

The proposal noted that although the government has announced that a national referendum and the parliamentary election would be held on the same day in February, it has "failed to create the expected environment" for such an election.

It said the move to hold the referendum and election simultaneously while "sidestepping the eight parties' demands" has

raised many questions.

Reiterating Jamaat's demand for elections under a proportional representation (PR) system, the Shura also repeated its call for suspending political activities of the 14-party alliance, including the Awami League and Jatiya Party.

It alleged that although Awami League's activities were suspended during the trial of its "fascist" leaders, its alliance partners had continued their "malicious activities", both openly and covertly, to worsen the law and order situation and "sabotage the election".

The Shura further demanded that, to ensure a proper election environment, the government immediately prepare a list of armed criminals, arrest them, bring them under the law, and recover all illegal firearms.

Hallmark MD

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deteriorated significantly around yesterday noon while he was in Dhaka Central Jail. Later, he was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

He breathed his last around 10:30pm while undergoing treatment.

Tanvir Mahmud was a key accused in the infamous Tk 4,000 crore Sonali Bank loan scam.

On March 19, last year, a Dhaka court sentenced nine people, including Hallmark Chairman Jasmine Islam and Tanvir Mahmud, to life imprisonment in a case filed over swindling Tk 10.5 crore out of Sonali Bank.

New law drafted

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reach Italy through Libya are detained and tortured in camps for money.

"These incidents constitute smuggling of migrants," he said, adding that including SOM in the law is a positive step.

He stressed that implementation will be key. "A law has little impact if it stays on paper. We need sustained awareness campaigns, especially in communities where people take such dangerous risks."

Justice and Care, which provided technical assistance in drafting the ordinance, said in a statement yesterday that the new law introduces comprehensive revisions to the previous law.

The ordinance defines SOM under Section 5 and imposes penalties of three to ten years' imprisonment and a minimum Tk 1 lakh fine for engaging in or assisting the offence.

It retains capital punishment for organised trafficking groups under Section 8 and allows life imprisonment for aggravated forms of migrant smuggling.

Calling the law a "critical step forward", Tariqul Islam, country director of Justice and Care, said, "The ordinance opens new avenues for prosecuting criminals who profit from exploiting vulnerable migrants. It now meets international standards and aligns with UN protocols."

BNP activists wait outside Evercare

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During a visit to the area yesterday afternoon, this correspondent found more than 50 leaders and activists standing near the entrance.

Meanwhile, leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, Khelafat Majlish, Nagorik Oikya, Gono Odhikar Parishad, National Democratic Movement, Jatiya Party and National Citizen Party also visited the hospital yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at different times afterwards, they voiced concern over her health and wished her a speedy recovery.

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, Social Welfare Adviser Sharmeen S Murshid, and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud,

as well as senior BNP leaders, including Standing Committee members Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, and Salahuddin Ahmed, went to the hospital.

Earlier in the day, a group under the banner "Moulik Bangla" held a prayer session and distributed tobarak.

In the morning, BNP issued a directive, asking its members not to gather in front of the hospital to avoid disrupting the treatment of Khaleda and other patients.

The party had earlier requested supporters to offer prayers at their homes, instead of visiting the hospital.

Despite the

announcement, more leaders and activists from different units continued arriving throughout the evening, waiting outside for any update on the BNP chief's condition.

Many expressed concern, saying they had come out of deep loyalty and emotional attachment.

Awlad Hossain, a BNP leader from Dhaka's Mirpur, said, "We came to know about Khaleda Zia's condition. Our leader is ill, so we came here."

Acknowledging the party directive, he added, "The party has asked us not to crowd. We are trying to keep the gathering as small as possible."

Around 5:00pm, Dhaka North City BNP Convener Aminul Haque arrived

and used a microphone to convince the crowd to disperse.

"Please don't crowd the hospital. Your prayers will reach from home," he told the activists, while volunteers held placards carrying the same message.

BNP leaders said the party is closely following the medical board's decisions and requested supporters nationwide to remain calm and continue praying for the former prime minister's recovery.

Khaleda is suffering from heart and lung infections and pneumonia and is currently being treated in the hospital's coronary care unit (CCU) under the supervision of both local and foreign specialists.

Frequent

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Former secretary and public administration expert Abdul Awal Mazumder told The Daily Star that the government's inability to stick to its decisions on transfers and postings reflects "incompetence, shortsightedness, and a lack of capacity."

"Given what has happened with the DC postings this time, it is not unreasonable to fear that the election may be affected," he added.

Govt okays draft NGO

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The amendment brings several changes to the existing law, simplifies NGO registration procedures, and relaxes conditions for the release of donations, said the Chief Adviser's Press Wing in a statement.

Under the revised law, donations of up to Tk 50 lakh per year will no longer require prior approval, making the regulations more stakeholder-friendly, it said.

The draft of the Police Commission Ordinance,

2025 was also presented at the advisory council meeting.

The Advisory Council instructed that the draft be submitted in a more detailed and revised form at its next meeting, the statement said.

Prayers were also offered for the swift recovery of former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia during the special meeting.

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain conducted the prayer, according to the CAO.