

## Syed Wasiful Islam made new Tabligh chief in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syed Wasiful Islam has been appointed the new ameer of Tablighi Jamaat Bangladesh.

The announcement was made yesterday at the Indonesia Ijtima by the World Ameer of Tablighi Jamaat, Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, during the global “Alami Mashwara”, according to a press release signed by the organisation’s media coordinator Md Sayem and sent from Jakarta.



According to the decision, Bangladesh’s current Shura member Prof Yunus Sikder will continue serving on the Shura under the new leadership, the release said, adding that Maulana Monir bin Yusuf of Kakrail and Hafiz Ojillah have been included in the Shura to assist the newly appointed ameer.

The appointment of Syed Wasiful Islam has sparked widespread joy among the members of Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh, the release said, noting that he has been a senior elder (murubbi) and a member of the Ahle Shura of Tablighi Jamaat Bangladesh since 1999.

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Workers bringing timber to the “bhashoman kaather haat” (floating wood market) in Pirojpur’s Nesarabad upazila, a traditional river-based timber hub in the Kathmahal area of the Sandhya River. From here, traders supply wood to different parts of the country, including Dhaka. Labourers earn around Tk 800-Tk 1,000 for a full day’s work from morning till evening.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## No guarantee vote rigging or killings won’t occur: Powar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar yesterday expressed doubts over the fairness of the upcoming national election.

“All parties, including the anti-fascist eight, have agreed to participate in the election, but the question over the election being free and fair still remains,” he said while speaking at the first divisional city rally of the eight like-minded parties at the Madrasa Ground in Rajshahi.

Referring to killings at the Khulna court gate yesterday, Porwar said, “In a country where murders can take place in front of a court, there is no guarantee that vote rigging or killings will not occur at polling stations under such an administration.”

The Jamaat leader also highlighted that attacks, assaults, and vandalism are being carried out by one group during Jamaat meetings, campaigns, and gatherings, including those of women.

He criticised the administration for failing to prevent such incidents, saying that if the authorities cannot stop these attacks, elections under their supervision cannot be impartial.

He said a level playing field has not yet been established and alleged that the administration has been compromised through secret manipulation in postings of DCs, SPs, UNOs, and other officials, giving an advantage to one party.



## Two shot dead at Khulna court gate

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a case, but the case has not yet been lodged.”

Shamim Uz Zaman, a physician of the KMCH’s emergency department, told The Daily Star that one of the deceased was brought dead shortly after 1:00pm. “He had two bullet wounds – one in the chest and another in the head.”

Witness Alauddin, who along with others took Rajon to KMCH, said the assailants arrived on two to three motorcycles and suddenly opened fire.

“I was standing right beside Rajon’s

motorcycle. The attackers shot and stabbed him with sharp weapons. They also attacked two others...”

CCTV footage from the court premises shows several men firing shots. After one collapses, an attacker hits him with a sharp weapon. Moments later, on-duty police personnel and locals are seen chasing the attackers.

Talking to this newspaper, Babul Hawlader, member secretary of Khulna Nagorik Samaj, said, “... The police superintendent’s office is just 300 feet away, the DC office is nearby, and the entire court area is always

crowded. If killings like this take place here, where is public safety? This incident shows how alarming Khulna’s law-and-order situation has become.”

Asked who might be involved, Sudarshan Kumar Ray, deputy commissioner (south) of Khulna Metropolitan Police, said, “We have found some initial clues. We are collecting more CCTV footage.”

He added that Hasib’s body, which his family took home after the incident, was later taken by police and sent to the KMC morgue for an autopsy.

## ‘Hasina, AL leaders behind BDR mutiny’

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and former army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed among those the commission holds responsible.

He said only the “highest-level figures” were being identified publicly, while the names of others allegedly involved were being withheld.

According to the commission chief, “frustrated officers who had been superseded” were used to execute the carnage, while long-standing grievances among BDR jawans, particularly over profit-sharing in programmes like “Operation daal-bhaat”, were exploited.

Fazlur cited the case of former army chief General Aziz Ahmed, who was superseded three times and should have lost his job but was instead made director general of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), formerly Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). He was later made army chief. Aziz was the BDR chief in 2009.

He said the planning began after the 2008 election and continued for months, with meetings allegedly held in mosques, on training grounds, and in various other places.

“The real aim was to weaken the forces and destabilise Bangladesh. That was the conspiracy,” he said.

When asked why there was no army operation to suppress the mutiny, the commission chief called it a deliberate political attempt. Though the 46th Brigade was initially deployed, the army’s involvement was later withdrawn.

Fazlur claimed that the army wanted to launch an operation to quell the mutiny, but then army chief Gen Moeen left the Army Headquarters for the state guesthouse Jamuna and “stayed there all day”, accompanied by the navy and air force chiefs.

This, he said, created a vacuum in command.

In Moeen’s absence, he alleged, Gen Tarique Ahmed Siddique set up “a parallel chain of command”, and the army was instructed to fall back several kilometres towards the Abahani ground.

“Inside Pikhana BDR headquarters there was no strong command, as senior officers had been killed or detained. It would have been easy to contain them if the army had intervened,” he said.

He added that although Rapid Action Battalion units were positioned 30–40 metres away and “fully equipped”, Col Reza Noor “forbade them to intervene”. The commission concluded that the army was deliberately prevented from taking action.

Fazlur cited Gen Moeen’s testimony, in which he reportedly said that if the army had intervened “India would have breached the sovereignty of Bangladesh and would not have left like they did in 1971”.

The commission chief said the inquiry found that India “benefited” from the mutiny, citing intelligence reports and Moeen’s statement.

He said 921 Indian nationals entered Bangladesh during the period and that investigators could not confirm that 67 of them returned to their homeland.

Fazlur described the intelligence failure as “mountainous”. He recommended building a coordinated intelligence structure.

In response to a question, he said multiple testimonies indicated that not only BDR members but also outsiders participated in the mutiny.

Among them, several were members of the Awami League, Jubo League, and Chhatra League.

The commission noted that a group of 20–25 entered the mutiny site in procession but later around

200 people came out.

The commission also documented attacks on families of army officers on the day of the mutiny. “Many were physically tortured before being killed; some had their eyes gouged out,” Fazlur said.

Briefing the media, the commission chief said that they also found that at least five army officers were forcibly disappeared following the mutiny.

The commission recommended structural reforms in the army, border guard, police, administration, and intelligence agencies.

“Enhancing intelligence capabilities, establishing an apex coordination body, and structural reforms are among our recommendations,” he said.

In addition to interviewing 247 witnesses, the commission inspected more than 52 investigation reports by the border force, the home ministry, multiple intelligence agencies, including the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and the Rapid Action Battalion.

After receiving the report, Yunus thanked commission members for what he described as professional and impartial work.

He pledged that the government would ensure justice for members of the armed forces who were “unjustly subjected to discrimination and oppression” during the previous government, just as justice would be ensured for other public officials.

The commission also included Brigadier General (retd) Md Saidur Rahman Bir Pratik, former joint secretary Munshi Alauddin Al Azad, former DIG M Akbar Ali, Prof Md Shariful Islam of Dhaka University, and Assistant Prof Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan of Jagannath University.

## Aburkhill: A sanctuary for freedom fighters

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lives on in the pages of Rokeya Kabir and Mujib Mehedi’s “Muktijuddho O Nari”, Jagannath Barua’s “Muktijuddhe Bouddhoder Obadan”, and Jamal Uddin’s “Bangladesher Swadhinata Sangramme O Muktijuddhe Chattogram”.

This correspondent visited Aburkhill and surrounding areas in June, speaking to at least 15 people – elderly residents, freedom fighters, Buddhist religious leaders, and those who once sought refuge here.

Their accounts align with the books – Bangalee personnel from the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and East Bengal Regiment who escaped after the first clashes also reached Aburkhill. Villagers first opened their own homes; when arrivals became too many, they opened Amitabh High School and Amitabh Primary School, turning classrooms into dormitories.

“It was agreed that the men would sleep in the school buildings, the women in homes,” said 73-year-old resident Manju Mutsuddi. “Each family took turns providing meals.”

### SANCTUARY FOR FREEDOM FIGHTERS

By June and July, as regrouped fighters returned from India, Aburkhill became a sanctuary again. The freedom fighters stayed until November, using the village as a base for reconnaissance and operations across Raozan.

Their greatest help came from an unexpected source – Bishuddhananda Mahathera, then head of the Dhamrajik Buddhist Monastery in Dhaka, and a revered monk from nearby Hoarapara. He passed away in Chattogram in 1994 at the age of 85. In 1971, he maintained deep ties with influential Buddhist leaders in China. As China remained Pakistan’s ally, an identity card for Buddhists was introduced nationwide for their protection at his initiative. In Aburkhill, nearly every resident received one, and so did the freedom fighters hiding among them.

“The cards reached fighters through the villagers,” said Banasree Mahathera, 87, then head of the Aburkhill Central Buddhist Monastery and now an organiser of the Bangladesh Buddhist Monks’ Association. “Everyone looked Bangalee, so it became hard for the Pakistan army and Razakars to tell fighters from villagers.”

The fighters slipped out under cover of darkness for operations, returning before dawn. One of their most audacious operations was the October 6 attack on the Madunaghat Power Plant in Hathazari which supplied electricity to Chattogram city and port. Fighters from Aburkhill scouted the area by boat for days.

“Under Sultan Mahmud Bir Uttam’s command, 10 of us crossed the Halda by boat and attacked

the plant,” said freedom fighter Didarul Alam, 77. “We destroyed two transformers with rocket launchers.”

The assault came at a steep price. Abdul Mannan Bir Bilkram was critically wounded; Sultan Mahmud was shot in the knee; several others were injured.

### RENU KONA’S MAKESHIFT HOSPITAL

Their only hope was a makeshift hospital run by Dr Renu Kona Barua, an assistant surgeon at the East Pakistan Railway Hospital who had

men from their homes, interrogating and torturing them. They were freed only after pleas from Buddhist leaders.

Fear thickened the air. Surveillance grew harsher. Fighters changed their movements. In late October, a Razakar disguised as a sari vendor slipped inside the village and alerted the army. Aburkhill was swiftly encircled.

“We were having lunch,” Didarul recalled. “They surrounded the village and opened fire. We fired



Aburkhill Central Buddhist Monastery



Dr Renu Kona



Didarul Alam



Manju Mutsuddi



Paritosh Barua

returned to her father’s home in Aburkhill after her husband, Supati Ranjan, was abducted and killed by the Pakistan army and Biharis.

Grief sharpened her resolve. She turned a room in the home of local resident Bireswar Barua into a clinic, trained several young women, and began treating fighters and villagers alike.

“We brought Mannan and the others by boat,” said eyewitness Paritosh Barua, now 90. “Renu Kona worked day and night, but she could not save Mannan as his stomach had been torn by bullets.”

Villagers say countless fighters and refugees received care from her. “She was the only hope for this area,” said 84-year-old Khagendra Lal Barua.

Dr Renu Kona passed away in the United States on October 27, 2015, at the age of 79.

### FEAR ON EVERY DOORSTEP

After the Madunaghat attack, Aburkhill braced itself. Watch posts rose at the edges of the village; movement shrank to necessity. But within days, tipped off by Razakars, the Pakistan army stormed in, dragging young and middle-aged

back, but their weapons were too strong. We crossed the shallow Halda and escaped to Baroighona.”

With the fighters gone, the army and Razakars barged into homes, arresting and torturing villagers for sheltering combatants. None revealed anything.

### VILLAGE THAT FOUGHT

Aburkhill did not only shelter freedom fighters and refugees. It joined the struggle itself. Ten young men left early in the war for training in India.

“All but me fought in the Mukti Bahini. I fought in the Indian Army,” said freedom fighter Temiyo Kumar Mutsuddi, 75. Others trained inside Bangladesh and joined various fronts.

Chattogram freedom fighter Abul Kashem, 82, grew emotional as he recalled those days. “The people of Aburkhill gave us everything from food to shelter to supplies. They were tortured for hiding us, but they never betrayed us.”

Didarul added softly, “Every home sheltered refugee girls. Villagers had no space of their own, yet the women of Aburkhill made room on cold floors for us. Their suppt was beyond words.”

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Tarique, who went to the UK in 2008 amid a barrage of cases, wrote on his Facebook on Saturday that he longs to come home and be by his ailing mother’s side, but the decision is not entirely in his hands.

Last week, Khaleda was hospitalised with infections in her heart and lungs and remains under treatment in the Coronary Care Unit at Evercare Hospital.

Asked whether there was pressure from any foreign country, Touhid said, “It seems unusual to me that a citizen would be barred from returning to their own country. If Bangladesh wants to allow its citizen to come back, how can another country object?”

The adviser, however, said he was unsure about Tarique’s residence status in London.

Replying to a query, he said, “There is no reason to assume that the upcoming national election will be postponed or cancelled or will not be fair if Tarique Rahman does not return to the country.”

Speaking about the health condition of Khaleda Zia, Touhid said she is currently not fit to travel abroad for treatment.

“If her condition improves and the party formally requests, the government will provide support if necessary.”

### KHALEDA’S CONDITION

Khaleda’s health has shown some improvement, but she’s still not fit to be taken abroad for advanced treatment, according to her doctors.

“She had liquid food yesterday and was responding to calls, which is encouraging. Her condition has improved slightly over the last two days. But it cannot yet be described as significant,” a source from her medical board told this newspaper.

As such, doctors are yet to decide on sending her abroad, the source added.

The former prime minister was admitted to Evercare Hospital in Dhaka on November 23 on the advice of her

medical board.

She is suffering from pneumonia and currently receiving treatment in the hospital’s Coronary Care Unit.

Party leaders said that preparations are underway so that once the medical board deems her fit for travel, arrangements can be made immediately.

Senior BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday said Tarique has been in constant contact with doctors from London and is coordinating all aspects of his mother’s treatment.

“Tarique Rahman has been spending his days worried over his mother’s health. I doubt whether he is even getting any sleep.”

Khaleda, 80, has long been battling multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis and kidney issues. She has a permanent pacemaker and has previously undergone stent placement for her heart.

Seeking anonymity, a member of her medical board had earlier told this newspaper that excess fluid has built up in her body, requiring regular dialysis. She is also being given oxygen support to help her breathe comfortably.

### HASINA, FOREIGN TIES

Touhid also said Bangladesh has been realigning its foreign policies after the July uprising.

Regarding relations with India since deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled there, he said Delhi needs time to adjust to the new realities, adding that Dhaka seeks good working relations based on mutual respect and shared interests.

He said that during the Awami League regime, the warm relations were mainly between the two governments, not the peoples. “The previous regime could not solve the Teesta and border killing issues in 15 years.”

Asked what the relations with India would be if it does not extradite Hasina, who is facing death sentences for crimes against humanity, he said the relations would not be stuck over a single issue.

Dhaka has written twice to New Delhi, seeking extradition of Hasina. Delhi last week said it was looking into the request.

“Since she is convicted, we surely want her extradition to implement the punishment. I, however, don’t think other issues will get stuck for this issue.”

He mentioned that Bangladesh’s efforts will also continue in line with its demands for Teesta water sharing deal and halting border killings, stressing that one issue is not dependent on the other.

Referring to a recent remark by Chief Adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam, Touhid said he does not have any information on whether former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, who is also facing the death penalty, would be extradited first.

Asked about the recent warm relations with Pakistan and its implications on the relations with other countries, including India, Touhid said since 2009, Bangladesh’s relationship with Pakistan has been deliberately kept tense.

“Now it is normal. We have course-corrected the relations,” he said, adding that it is important for Dhaka to have alternative sources of daily essentials, and Pakistan can be one such alternative.

Asked if there is any chance Awami League will participate in the next polls, Touhid said its activities have been restricted and it has been socially accepted that the party will not be taking part in the polls.

He said there have been a lot of changes in global politics, especially in the US policies, and many countries, especially ones like Bangladesh, are also realigning their positions.

Bangladesh will continue to adjust its policies with priority to national interest, he said, adding that there are some shortcomings regarding coordination with other domestic stakeholders.