

Jamaat seeks gunman, police protection for its ameer

BAHARAM KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has sought round-the-clock deployment of a gunman for its ameer, Dr Shafiqur Rahman, and the posting of armed police personnel for the security of his residence.

The party sent a letter to the home adviser with the request, which was received at the ministry on December 21.

The letter, a copy of which The Daily Star obtained, said Jamaat has long been engaged in what it described as a “just struggle” to establish people’s fundamental rights, build a justice-based society and consolidate democracy, and that it has become a popular political party through that process.

It claimed that during the previous “fascist” government, Jamaat’s leadership faced “inhuman” torture, oppression, killings and enforced disappearances. The party further alleged that for building movements against “wrongdoing and misdeeds”,

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus pays respects to Abdul Karim Khandker, former deputy commander of the Liberation War and the first chief of the Bangladesh Air Force, by placing a floral wreath on his coffin after the funeral at BAF Base Bashar Parade Ground in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Liberation War dep commander AK Khandker laid to eternal rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdul Karim Khandker, former deputy commander of the Liberation War and the first chief of the Bangladesh Air Force, was laid to rest with full state honours yesterday.

Khandker, who was awarded Bir Uttam, was buried at the Shaheen Graveyard at BAF Base Bashar in the capital, said an ISPR press release.

Earlier, his namaz-e-janaza and a funeral parade were held at the BAF Base Bashar Parade Ground after Zohr prayers.

The imam of the BAF Base Bashar central mosque conducted the janaza, attended by advisers of the interim government, chiefs of the three services, senior civil and military officials, and members of the armed forces.

Earlier, pallbearers slow-marched the coffin to the stage while a funeral parade was held, according to a state salute to Khandker.

BAF Air Secretary Air Vice Marshal Abdullah Al Mamun read out the war hero’s biography. Khandker’s son, Jafrul Karim Khandker, also spoke.

Following the prayers, tributes poured in. On behalf of President Mohammed Shahabuddin, his military secretary paid homage to Khandker by placing a wreath on his coffin.

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India-Bangladesh relations

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diplomatic zone where the Bangladesh High Commission is located.

He rejected the Indian press note regarding the event, and said the matter was not as simple as it was portrayed.

“Our mission, the Bangladesh mission, is located deep within the diplomatic area. It is not situated on the outskirts or at the entrance of the diplomatic zone,” he said.

“How could a group of 25 or 30 people from a Hindu extremist organisation manage to reach so far into a secure area?”

Touhid said those individuals normally would not have been able to enter in this manner unless they were permitted.

“Standing there, they did not just give slogans protesting the killing of the Hindu man; they said much more.”

He said the information he received suggested that death threats were issued to Bangladesh High Commissioner Riaz Hamidullah, who resides there with his family. They felt threatened and panicked due to inadequate security as only two guards were present.

“Therefore, we believe it is the responsibility of that country to handle the situation more effectively.”

Usually, when a protest group marches toward such a secure area, police stop them at a considerable distance from the zone. This is standard practice everywhere, including in Bangladesh, he said.

Touhid further said a Bangladeshi citizen was brutally murdered, and there is no justification for equating this with minority security issues here. Bangladeshi authorities took immediate action.

“Such incidents occur not just in Bangladesh; they happen across all countries in this region, and it is every country’s responsibility to take appropriate measures. Bangladesh is taking such measures; others should do the same.”

Referring to New Delhi’s statement, he said Dhaka has taken note of India’s commitment to ensuring the security of all Bangladesh missions in India.

He said both countries are maintaining regular contact regarding the security of their missions.

Asked whether Dhaka is considering reducing the number of staff in the mission, Touhid said they would do so if such a situation arises. For now, Dhaka trusts that India will take appropriate security measures.

Earlier, India had drastically restricted visa issuance and trade

with Bangladesh following the August 5 changeover, when deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to New Delhi. On the other hand, Dhaka imposed restrictions on the import of Indian yarn through land ports.

While Delhi repeatedly expressed concerns over alleged attacks on minorities after the August changeover, Dhaka said these were internal matters and political in nature, and India should not intervene. Dhaka also spoke of exaggeration of certain incidents and the spread of misinformation and disinformation by sections of the Indian media.

Bangladesh repeatedly called on India to prevent Hasina from making incendiary comments, arguing that such remarks were creating instability in Bangladesh.

It also requested India twice – once in December last year and again in November this year – to extradite Hasina after the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced her and ex-minister Asaduzzaman Khan to death.

In a recent media interview, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said it was up to Hasina to decide whether to return home – a statement analysts view as an indication that India is unlikely to extradite Hasina anytime soon.

The latest escalation in Dhaka-Delhi tensions followed the shooting and subsequent death of Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi. There were news reports that the alleged shooter reportedly fled to India.

On December 14, Bangladesh’s foreign ministry summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma and drew attention to “anti-Bangladesh activities” by fugitive Awami League members currently based in India.

“These activities include planning, organising and facilitating terrorist acts inside Bangladesh with the objective of disrupting the forthcoming elections,” said the ministry statement.

The ministry also said Hasina has been calling on her supporters to engage in terrorist activities aimed at destabilising the country and derailing the election.

It urged New Delhi to ensure the immediate arrest and extradition of suspects involved in the shooting of Hadi – a key figure of the July uprising – should they enter Indian territory.

Delhi rejected Dhaka’s assertions the same day, saying India “never allowed its territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of the friendly people of Bangladesh”.

On December 17, the Indian foreign ministry summoned the Bangladesh High Commissioner to India to express strong concerns over the “deteriorating security environment” in Bangladesh.

In a statement later that day, it said, “India completely rejects the false narrative sought to be created by extremist elements regarding certain recent events in Bangladesh.”

“It is unfortunate that the interim government has neither conducted a thorough investigation nor shared meaningful evidence with India regarding the incidents.”

Delhi also said it supports peace and stability in Bangladesh and has consistently called for free, fair, inclusive, and credible elections conducted in a peaceful atmosphere.

In reaction to the statement, Touhid said that no advice was needed from India, which did not speak about any elections during the AL regime.

The same day, the IVAC at the Jamuna Future Park in Dhaka was shut at 2:00pm, citing security situation.

The announcement came as people under the banner of July Oilka planned to lay siege to the Indian High Commission, demanding repatriation of Hasina and her aides who fled to India. Police intercepted the march at Rampura.

Farewell to fallen soldiers

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to forgive his brother for any pain he may have caused during his service.

Masud served in the Bangladesh Army for 19 years and left behind an eight-year-old daughter, he said, urging prayers for the deceased and his family.

Mizanur Rahman, brother-in-law of private Mohammad Mominul Islam, also sought forgiveness on behalf of the fallen soldier and asked for prayers.

He said Mominul is survived by a younger brother, a sister, his wife, and two children – one aged two and the other 12. Rahman requested the authorities to keep the family under their care.

Abu Taher Mondol, uncle of private Shanto Mondal, said Shanto was the son of his cousin Nurul Islam Mondol, who had also served in the army. “Both of Nurul’s sons served in the force. Shanto joined the Bangladesh Army after completing school. Had Nurul been alive today, he would have been proud of his martyred son who sacrificed his life on duty.

“Shanto’s mother had been running the household relying on her two sons,” he said, requesting that service-related opportunities and benefits be ensured for the family.

Waliullah, brother-in-law of mess waiter Mohammad Jahangir Alam, said Jahangir had been married to his younger sister for around seven years and left behind a three-year-old son.

He recalled that Jahangir was not present at the child’s birth but had asked to name the baby. “He named him ‘Irfan’ after his sir. So deep was his loyalty to the force.”

Abdul Hamid, uncle of martyred washing man Mohammad Sobuj Mia, said Sobuj was serving in Bogura. Seeking forgiveness on his behalf, he added that Sobuj left behind an elderly mother and a wife he had recently married.

At the funeral, Boris Ephrem Tchoumavi, chief community liaison officer of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), offered gratitude and condolences to the government of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Army, the people of Bangladesh, and the families of the fallen peacekeepers.

He described them as soldiers of peace who served not for glory, but to protect the vulnerable, bridge divides, and work for peace and stability. “They did their duties with professionalism and commitment despite the inherent dangers of the mission, and this became their ultimate sacrifice for the cause of peace.”

Boris urged the families to remember not only how the peacekeepers died, but how they lived, citing their vigilance, integrity, and camaraderie. “Their legacies will live on.”

Before the funeral prayers, brief life sketches of the six were read out, and floral wreaths were placed on the coffins on behalf of the president, the chief adviser, and the three service chiefs.

They were then accorded state honours in line with military tradition.

Afterwards, their bodies were sent by helicopter to their ancestral homes – Natore, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rajbari, and Kishoreganj – where burial was completed with due dignity.

Sobuj Mia was laid to rest in his village in Gaibandha around 2:00pm, while Corporal Masud’s burial was also completed in Natore, report our district correspondents.

Democracy slipping into ‘mobocracy’

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“The role of those responsible for running the state and for holding a neutral election is now questionable,” he said.

Describing the arson attacks, Salahuddin said, “The way Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were set on fire and burned down – burned down to the ground – the whole world has seen those scenes. This is shameful for us. As a nation, we cannot end this matter just by expressing sorrow.”

In a vicious assault on press freedom,

Mobs launched coordinated attacks on the head offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka after Thursday midnight. They vandalised the offices, looted valuables, set the buildings ablaze, and trapped journalists and staff of the English daily inside for hours.

At the discussion, veteran journalist Shafik Rehman said the duty of journalists was not only to criticise the government but also to praise it for good work, so that people received a fair and balanced picture.

AK Azad, president of the Newspaper Owners’ Association of Bangladesh, expressed deep concern about the acceptability of the upcoming election due to such attacks.

“If this election is not accepted domestically and internationally, we will face a major crisis. Many foreign countries, with whom we do business, are closely watching our election,” he said.

Calling for a free working environment for the media, he added, “If you create an open environment and give us space to offer constructive criticism, we will do so responsibly.”

Proposing regular dialogue with the media after the election, he said, “If you invite us like this every six months, we will be able to point out your mistakes.”

Daily Manabzamin Editor Matur Rahman Chowdhury said the country was passing through a difficult time, with the nation deeply divided, making even speaking out hard.

Identifying security as the biggest

challenge, he said, “People want to feel safe going forward. But at present, people do not feel safe.”

“The offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo were attacked. What will happen next, no one knows. In this situation, people have higher expectations from the BNP,” he said.

He added that journalists wanted safety, freedom to write, and freedom of expression, and that they would welcome it if BNP ensured these.

“But if these are not ensured, we will criticise. To face the challenges ahead, we must remain united. If we fail to do so, the state will be at risk,” he said.

Prothom Alo Editor Matur Rahman said creating an environment of national unity and understanding was now the most important task for Bangladesh.

“No country can survive with so much conflict, division, and crisis. No government can run a country effectively in such a situation,” he said.

He said the coming period would be the most difficult for any party that forms the next government. He expressed hope for greater tolerance and a stronger willingness by BNP to accept criticism.

Referring to the past, he said that during the last 15 to 16 years under an authoritarian rule, the newspaper industry had faced unprecedented fear and pressure.

“If a government truly wants to move on a democratic path, it must listen to criticism from newspapers. Listen and understand – whether you accept it or not is the government’s decision. But if you do not listen, the same mistakes will be repeated,” he said.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said Bangladesh was in a deeply devastated state, with its institutions being challenged and destroyed.

“For the first time, the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star have been attacked with arson. Why did this happen? What crime did we commit?” he said.

He urged political parties to accept critical journalism as essential

for good governance and press freedom, noting that party members, intelligence agencies, and bureaucrats would not always tell political leaders the truth.

“It is the independent media that will tell you the truth about the country. If you do not want to hear that truth, you will make mistakes,” he said.

Kamal Ahmed, chief of the Media Reform Commission, said the BNP must ensure not only the safety of journalists in Dhaka, but also protect working journalists at the grassroots from harassment by party leaders and activists, so they can work without fear.

Bonik Barta Editor Dewan Hanif Mahmud said the country was going through a critical time and that an attack on the media meant an attack on the country, free thinking, and the structure of the state.

Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin, Jugantor Editor Abdul Hye Shikder, Kaler Kantho Editor Hasan Hafiz, UNB Editor Mahfuzur Rahman, Naya Diganta Executive Editor Masudur Rahman Khalili, Bangladesh Pratidin Executive Editor Manjurul Islam, Channel 24 Managing Director Jahirul Alam, and Jamuna TV Chief Executive Fahim Ahmed, among others, also spoke at the event.

Several attackers of media houses

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“Setting fire to institutions and burning people to death are unjust and unacceptable crimes,” he said, reiterating the government’s determination to punish the perpetrators.

On the night of December 19, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo came under an organised attack. Both newspapers suspended publication the following day but resumed on December 21 under special arrangements. Their offices, however, remain in ruins.

Terrible moment

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devastation caused by the attacks on the newspaper.

On Thursday night, following news of the death of Inqilab Monch spokesman Sharif Osman Hadi, the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, located in the capital’s Kawran Bazar, were vandalised, looted and set on fire. The fire was extinguished in the early hours of Friday.

At least 28 journalists and staff of The Daily Star were trapped for several hours before they were rescued around 5:00am on Friday.

The Daily Star and Prothom Alo could not bring out their Friday’s print edition and the website remained non-operational.

“I hope we never see anything like this again – it was a terrible moment for Bangladesh democracy. Now you must be resilient, get back on your feet, keep

publishing, keep reporting and hold everyone to account in order for the elections to proceed smoothly,” Miller said.

Meanwhile, Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Botchwey has expressed deep concern about the situation in Bangladesh following the recent violence in Dhaka and other areas of the country.

She urged respect for the rule of law and for the authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety of all, including the media.

Botchwey welcomed the statement of the interim government that promised to hold those responsible for violence to account and called for restraint, responsibility and an abiding commitment to reject hatred.

She also appealed for calm and the highest degree of prudence and forbearance at this critical time.

BONDI BEACH SHOOTING Australia falls silent, lights candles for victims

AFP, Sydney

Australians fell silent in flickering candlelight yesterday in memory of the Bondi Beach shooting victims, one week after gunmen fired into crowds celebrating a Jewish festival.

A father and son are accused of targeting the beachside Hanukkah event, killing 15 people in the nation’s deadliest mass shooting in almost three decades.

From raucous city pubs to sleepy country towns, Australia observed a minute’s silence at 6:47 pm (0747 GMT) – exactly a week since the first reports of gunfire.

Countless homes lined their

windowills with candles in a gesture of “light over darkness”, a key theme of the Hanukkah festival.

“Last week took our innocence and, like the grass here at Bondi was stained with blood, so too has our nation been stained,” said David Ossip, president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies.

Summer winds buffeted flags lowered to half-mast across the country, including over the famed Sydney Harbour Bridge.

A candle was lit before thousands of people held their silent vigil at Bondi Beach.