

Tarique to take over as BNP chairman in a few days

Says Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman would become the chairman within the next few days.

He made the remarks while speaking to journalists at a views-sharing programme at a hotel in Sylhet city in the evening.

Fakhrul said the post of BNP chairperson has remained vacant following the death of Khaleda Zia, and Tarique would fill the vacancy.

He added that the BNP would once again launch its election campaign from Sylhet, as it did in the past.

Fakhrul said, "The election is important for the nation as people had long been deprived of their voting rights. Although the media has expressed concerns over the polls, the BNP does not share those fears. The party has consistently demanded an election."

He said Khaleda had continued her democratic struggle, and expressed hope for building a democratic Bangladesh in line with her vision.

"Democracy is not built overnight, nor does democratic culture develop in a single day. BNP is committed to forming a democratic parliament through the electoral process."

"Since the interim government took office, a culture of mob violence has taken root over the past year, eroding democracy."

The BNP leader stressed that only collective resistance could counter the trend, adding that such resistance is possible only by returning to a democratic system through a free and fair election.



A still image from video, posted on the White House's Rapid Response 47 account on X, shows Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro being escorted in custody down a hallway at the US Drug Enforcement Administration headquarters in New York City on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Assailants storm home, kill man, injure wife, child

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A 35-year-old man was killed in a gun attack that also left his wife and daughter injured in Bagha upazila of Rajshahi yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sohel Rana of Palashi Fatepur Karali Naoshara Char area under Chakrajapur union.

According to a neighbour, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the attackers created panic by repeatedly striking the tin walls of Sohel Rana's house around 1:00am, producing loud noises that woke nearby residents.

As locals came out of their homes, the armed assailants reportedly threatened to shoot anyone who approached the house. They then cut through the tin wall, entered the house and opened fire.

One bullet hit Sohel Rana in the abdomen, while his wife and daughter were also injured in the gunfire, locals said.

The victims were rushed to Bagha Upazila Health Complex, where the on-duty doctor declared Sohel Rana dead. His wife and daughter were admitted to the health complex and are undergoing treatment.

Bagha Police Station Inspector (Investigation) Suprabhat Mondol said police initially suspect the killing was a planned attack linked to a previous murder case.

"The body has been recovered and sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy," he said, adding that legal action would be taken following the investigation.

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75% from Jamaat, 68% of still missing are from BNP

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"Given the centralised style of decision-making during this period, and the degree of coordination required across agencies, it is difficult to conceive that such a system could have functioned for over a decade without the awareness of Sheikh Hasina and those immediately around her," it said.

Commission Chairperson Justice Moynul Islam Chowdhury and members Justice Md Farid Ahmed Shibli, Nur Khan Liton, Nabila Idris and Sajjad Hossain formally handed over the report at Jamuna in the presence of Housing and Public Works Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan and Chief Adviser's Principal Secretary Sirajuddin Mia.

Commission member Nabila Idris said complaints were still coming in, supporting the estimate of 4,000 to 6,000 disappearances. She said tracing survivors often led to other unreported cases, while some victims refused to speak or had moved abroad.

DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

The data show sharply diverging patterns of harm. Among survivors, 22 percent were linked to the BNP and its allies. Among those still missing, 22 percent belonged to Jamaat Shibir.

The victims include 476 Jamaat members, 236 from Islami Chhatra

Shibir, 142 BNP members, 46 from Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and 17 from Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal.

The report identifies two distinct strategies. Jamaat and Shibir members were more likely to be detained, surveilled, harassed and pushed through criminal cases before they eventually resurfaced. BNP activists, by contrast, were more often made to disappear permanently and, in many cases, eliminated.

This concentration of victims among Jamaat, Shibir and the BNP points to "selective and systematic targeting of specific political ideologies", not random abuse. "The core finding -- that disappearances were deeply entangled with political identity -- therefore remains robust," it said.

According to a press release from the Chief Adviser's Press Wing, ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tariq Ahmed Siddique, and then home minister Asaduzzaman Khan were directly involved in several high-profile disappearance cases.

Victims cited include BNP leaders Ilias Ali, Humam Qadir Chowdhury, Salahuddin Ahmed and Chowdhury Alam; Jamaat leader and former brigadier general Abdullahil Aman Azmi; Mir Ahmad Bin Qasem; and



Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances hands over its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

former ambassador Maruf Zaman.

Commission members said Hasina personally issued orders in several cases. Evidence of secret renditions to India, carried out without legal process, pointed unmistakably to authorisation from the highest levels of government.

Prof Yunus praised the commission's work as historic, describing the crimes as brutal

and emblematic of a collapse in democratic institutions.

He urged that the report be made accessible to the public in simple language, instructed the commission to submit recommendations and action plans, and ordered the mapping of all sites linked to extrajudicial killings and disappearances, including known torture centres.

The commission thanked the chief

adviser for his support, called for restructuring the National Human Rights Commission, and urged stronger protections for victims so that, it said, such darkness never settles again over the state.

PATTERNS

The report also maps how enforced disappearances evolved over time. Cases surged after 2012, peaked during the 2013-14 election crisis, and rose again ahead of the 2018 polls.

Another spike followed street protests in 2022. After the 2016 Holey Artisan attack, counterterror operations increasingly overlapped with political repression, with the same agencies and officers moving between both roles.

Disappearances resulting in permanent loss were mostly concentrated between 2011 and 2016.

After 2017, such cases declined, but the practice persisted in another form. Victims were detained secretly, prosecuted in fabricated cases, and later released under controlled conditions.

The removal of Major General Ziaul Ahsan from his post as Rab's additional director general (operations) in 2016 coincided with a gradual fall in permanent

disappearances.

Survivors described systematic efforts to erase political identities. Victims killed in the Sundarbans were labelled "pirates", those in Cox's Bazar "drug traffickers", and those in Narayanganj "gang members" -- narratives the commission said lacked credibility.

The report names the Rapid Action Battalion as the most frequently cited force, appearing in nearly 25 percent of complaints, followed by police (23 percent) and the Detective Branch (14.5 percent).

The CTC accounted for about 5 percent. DGFI and NSI appeared less frequently, though the commission noted this likely understates their role due to the secrecy of intelligence facilities.

In 37 cases, victims were abducted by unidentified plainclothes men. Another 119 complaints cited captors who described themselves only as "proshashoner lok" (people from the administration), suggesting deliberate ambiguity to shield perpetrators from accountability.

Joint operations were common. The most frequent combinations involved DB and police, DGFI and Rab, CTC and DB, DB and Rab, and police and Rab, with several cases involving three or more agencies.

Business leaders call on Tarique

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In response, the BNP assured them that if voted to power, the party will address these matters.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman of Pran-RFL Group, said that Tarique Rahman gave significant time and attention to the concerns raised by the business community during the meeting.

"He listened to us for two and a half hours and took note of everything we said. It gives us hope that the future of business in Bangladesh will improve," Ahsan told reporters after the meeting.

He said the discussion covered a wide range of issues -- from law and order to banking challenges -- and that no major concern was left unaddressed.

"Our fellow business leaders were able to present the problems faced in the country very clearly, and he was patient throughout," he added.

He expressed optimism that the BNP leader would take necessary steps to address the issues if the party returns to power.

Abdul Mukhtar, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, said, "...some business leaders raised common issues -- lack of gas supply, deteriorating law and order, inconsistent NBR policies, infrastructure problems, high bank interest rates, and high VAT."

The BAPI president quoted Tarique as saying that BNP aims to develop the capital market to reduce the cost of funds for businesses.

"Tarique Rahman told us clearly: 'You are the manufacturers; you generate employment and drive prosperity. We will only provide an enabling environment.'"

Mohammad Hatem, president

of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said he highlighted concerns around Bangladesh's upcoming graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

"I told Tarique Rahman that the government's current approach to LDC graduation is self-destructive. He agreed with my view."

Hatem also expressed deep concern about the recently proposed labour law reforms, warning that they could severely impact the readymade garment (RMG) sector -- much like how the once-thriving jute sector declined.

"Tarique Rahman acknowledged the concerns and said he had already spoken to the current government, urging them not to implement the law at this stage."

According to Hatem, the discussion also covered issues such as the ongoing gas and electricity crisis, corruption, instability in law and order, and frequent policy changes by the National Board of Revenue.

"Everyone present echoed concerns over deteriorating law and order, along with the broader impact of corruption and inconsistent tax policies."

Banking sector problems were also raised, with several participants, including some bank owners, addressing policy shortcomings and the growing number of struggling industries.

"In total, the core issues discussed were labour law reforms, LDC graduation, law and order, tax policy, corruption, infrastructure, and banking sector instability."

Talking to reporters after the meeting, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said business leaders

have trust in the party, adding that if voted to power, BNP will address their expectations and problems.

He said that Tarique listened to the major problems business leaders are facing, which is why investment is not happening in the country.

"Our employment is declining. We discussed the problems in the banking sector, the stock exchange, the capital market, and other related issues. They hope that if BNP is voted to power, it will be able to address the expectations."

"There are problems with bureaucrats, problems with extortionists, and high bank interest rates. Because of corruption, the cost of doing business is increasing, and people have to pay more. As a result, prices of essential goods are rising."

He said business leaders are unable to run their businesses in an unfavourable situation. "... If Bangladeshi business leaders cannot invest, how will foreign businesspeople invest?" he asked.

"Tarique Rahman has promised businesspeople that these problems will be solved."

Among others present at the meeting were, Mahbubur Rahman, president International Chamber of Commerce; Simeen Rahman, group CEO of Transcom and vice president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI); Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI); AK Azad, managing director of Ha-Meem Group; Tapan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Pharmaceuticals; Mir Nasir Hossain, former president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Matiur Rahman, chairman and managing director

of Uttara Group of Companies; Ali Akbar, chairman of Bangladesh Steel Re-rolling Mills; Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman of Pran-RFL Group; Taskeen Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI); Md Jahangir Alam, president of Bangladesh Steel Manufacturers Association; Mohammad Hatem, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA); Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries; Matiur Rahman, chairman of Uttara Motors; Kamran T Rahman, president of MCCI; Kutubuddin Ahmed, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA); Fazlul Hoque, former president of the BKMEA; Nihad Kabir, former president of the MCCI; Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of BGMEA; and Shawkat Aziz, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

In addition, Azizul Kayser of Partex Group; Hossain Khaled, former president of DCCI; Md Shahriar, president of the Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies; Moynul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers & Exporters Association; Abdul Mukhtar, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI); Abdul Hai Sarkar, president of the Bangladesh Association of Banks; Amirul Haque, managing director of Seacom Group; Preeti Chakraborty, senior vice president of BCI; Fazle Shamim Ehsan, president of the Bangladesh Employers' Federation; and Sharif Zahir, chairman of United Commercial Bank were also present.

Venezuela VP to pay 'big price'

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a report by the New York Times late Saturday.

At home, Maduro's allies were still in charge and have denounced their leader's "kidnapping" as part of an imperialist oil grab.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio yesterday said the Trump administration will work with the existing Venezuelan leadership. Rubio told NBC's "Meet the Press" that the US was fighting drug traffickers, "not a war against Venezuela."

Trump on Saturday evening appeared to reject the possibility of Venezuela's opposition taking power and said he could work instead with Maduro's vice president, Delcy

correspondents said.

The Venezuelan military announced it recognised Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, as acting president, and urged people to resume normal life.

A US government plane carrying Maduro landed at a military base shortly after nightfall on Saturday, and he was transported by helicopter to New York City, where the couple were to be arraigned on drug trafficking and weapons charges.

The White House posted video on X of Maduro, handcuffed and in sandals, escorted by federal agents through a US Drug Enforcement Administration facility in New York. "Good night, happy new year," the 63-year-old leftist is heard saying in English.

Indicted on various federal charges, including narco-terrorism conspiracy, Maduro is expected to make an initial appearance in Manhattan federal court today, according to a Justice Department official.

The US lifted airspace restrictions over the Caribbean late on Saturday after barring commercial flights during the military operation.

Venezuela's ally China said it "strongly condemns" the US operation, and called for Maduro to be "immediately released."

"The US's move is in clear violation of international law, basic norms in international relations, and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter," China's Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Meanwhile, France warned a solution cannot "be imposed from outside."

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected."

At Venezuela's request, the UN Security Council will meet today to discuss the crisis, the Somali presidency of the Council told AFP.

- Venezuela's SC orders VP Rodriguez to assume power
- Maduro to appear in Manhattan federal court today
- US to work with Venezuela leaders if they choose right path: Rubio
- US lifts Caribbean airspace restrictions
- UNSC to meet today over US action in Venezuela

Rodriguez.

Rodriguez, however, poured cold water on that, demanding Maduro's release and vowing to "defend" the country, reports AFP.

Late Saturday, Venezuela's Supreme Court ordered Rodriguez to assume presidential powers "in an acting capacity."

The streets of Caracas were calm yesterday in the wake of Saturday's raid. Residents queued up to buy food in grocery stores and the masked, heavily armed police visible the previous day were gone, AFP