

DEATH OF WIFE, SON 39 noted citizens condemn denial of parole to Saddam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a joint statement yesterday, 39 rights activists, legal experts and academics condemned what they described as the inhuman denial of parole to former Chhatra League leader Jewel Hossain Saddam, even after the death of his wife and child.

They demanded that the government identify those responsible through a high-level, impartial investigation and take strict action against the officials concerned.

Saddam, former president of the Subarnadanga upazila unit of BCL in Bagerhat, has been in jail for the past 11 months in several cases filed after the July uprising last year.

He was initially held at Bagerhat District Jail, but was transferred to Jashore Central Jail in December 2025. On January 23, Saddam's wife, Suborna Swarnali, and their nine-month-old son were found dead at their home.

Family members said Swarnali had been suffering from depression as Saddam was not being granted bail.

After the deaths, Saddam's family rushed from Bagerhat to Jashore with a parole application. However, due to what the statement described as bureaucratic indifference and the excuse of weekly holidays, no steps were taken to assist them.

Instead, according to media reports cited in the statement, police submitted a report claiming that bringing Saddam out could worsen the law-and-order situation due to a possible gathering of thousands of people, and advised the district administration not to consider the application positively.

Eventually, the family brought the two bodies from Bagerhat to Jashore Central Jail so that Saddam could see them for the last time. He was allowed only five minutes.

"We strongly condemn and protest this incident. We denounce the inhuman, thoughtless and cruel behaviour of the bureaucracy," it said.

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10 journos hurt in attack in Narsingdi

STAR REPORT

At least 10 journalists were injured in an attack on members of the Bangladesh Crime Reporters Association (CRAB) in front of Dream Holiday Park in Madhabdi, Narsingdi, yesterday.

The incident occurred around 7:30pm as CRAB members were returning from their annual picnic.

Police detained two suspects from the scene, said Madhabdi Police Station OC Kamal Hossain. According to police, CRAB members from different Dhaka-based media outlets had parked their cars in a privately owned space outside the amusement park, which is commonly used as a parking area.

While no extra fee was mentioned in the morning, attendants later demanded additional charges when the vehicles were being taken out. An argument broke out, leading to the attack. Ten journalists were injured; one was admitted to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital and nine were sent to Dhaka for treatment.

OC Kamal said the arrested individuals had faced previous complaints for collecting excessive fees from the same spot, which is not owned by the park authorities.



Unscrupulous traders openly sell squirrels at a weekly bird market, in violation of the Wildlife Conservation Act. Under the law, hunting, selling and transporting squirrels are punishable offences. These traders trap squirrels from nearby forests and villages, threatening the species' survival, and sell them for Tk 500 to Tk 2,000 depending on age. The photo was taken recently at the Noyabati bird market in Khalishpur, Khulna.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Uneven access, weak financial protection plague healthcare

Experts tell policy dialogue on Universal Health Coverage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although Bangladesh has made measurable progress in several health outcomes, including immunisation and maternal healthcare, the country is lagging in many indicators for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030, health experts and professionals said yesterday.

They said access to quality health services remains uneven, while financial protection against health-related expenditures continues to be limited for a large segment of the population.

They emphasised the need for targeted initiatives, expansion of quality primary healthcare and an increase in the health budget, among several other interventions, to achieve the targets.

The observations came at a policy dialogue titled "Monitoring Progress on Universal Health Coverage", held yesterday at the CIRDP Auditorium in the capital.

The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and the UHC Forum organised the dialogue with support from Unicef.

Aminul Hasan, member secretary of the UHC Forum, gave a detailed presentation on progress and challenges, citing recent data.

According to service coverage indicators, Bangladesh's score stands at 54 out of 100, driven mainly by gains in childhood immunisation at 98 percent and tuberculosis treatment at 95 percent.

However, the country is lagging in the management of non-communicable diseases, including hypertension and diabetes, as well as in the people-to-



SUGGESTIONS

- **Increase allocation for health budget**
- **Expand quality primary healthcare services**
- **Reduce out-of-pocket health expenditure**
- **Improve access for low-income, marginalised groups**
- **Strengthen NCD prevention, treatment**

healthcare worker ratio.

Although access to services is increasing, healthcare is becoming more expensive for service seekers due to high out-of-pocket expenditure – the money people pay directly from their own pockets – which has reached 73 percent, he said.

There are also significant gaps in access to healthcare based on financial status,

geographic location and gender, he added.

Giving a regional comparison, Aminul said Bangladesh's score stands at 54, compared to 69 for India and 78 for Sri Lanka, while Pakistan's score is 48.

"Bangladesh has made commendable but uneven progress towards UHC, with strengths in maternal and child health, immunisation and reduced mortality since 2015. However, as of 2025, the country remains substantially far from the 2030 goals," he said.

Prof MA Faiz, former director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said, "The reality indicates that we are not doing well."

He said people from the lower quintile of society, who need services the most, are the ones most deprived of them.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC and convener of the UHC Forum, stressed the need to move from discussion to strategy and decentralisation at the institutional level.

He said the dialogue focused on how to operationalise identified priorities and chart a clear way forward, and highlighted the growing importance of engaging political actors in health reform.

Ashadul Islam, former health secretary, Prof Abul Kalam Azad, another former director general of DGHS, Mohammad Touhidul Islam, national professional officer (health financing) of WHO Bangladesh, Shamim Hayder Talukder, chief executive officer of Eminence, Aftab Uddin, country director of Hope Foundation for Women and Children of Bangladesh, and Shishir Moral, special correspondent at Prothom Alo, also spoke at the programme.

'Safe water a universal right'

Convention adopts 12-point Khulna Declaration

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The third Coastal Water Convention 2026 concluded in Khulna yesterday with a strong call to recognise safe water as a universal right and to adopt integrated, ecosystem-based approaches to address Bangladesh's deepening water crisis.

Held from January 24 to 26 at the CSS Ava Centre, the three-day convention brought together policymakers, researchers, development practitioners and community representatives to discuss water insecurity, climate change impacts and governance challenges in coastal and other vulnerable regions of the country.

The convention ended with the adoption of the 12-point Khulna Declaration, which outlines a comprehensive roadmap to address water scarcity, salinity intrusion, waterlogging, ecosystem degradation and livelihood insecurity across coastal and inland regions.

The declaration emphasises that water should not be treated merely as a resource, but recognised as a fundamental component of ecosystems.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt ecosystem-based water management

○ **Formulate water policy, action plan**

○ **End waterlogging, saline water intrusion**

○ **Free rivers from encroachment**

○ **Promote community-based water management**

Among its key recommendations, the declaration calls for the formulation of a distinct national water policy and action plan that reflects the ecological sensitivity of Bangladesh's diverse agro-ecological zones. The declaration stresses the need for community-based water and wetland management, combining indigenous knowledge with modern technology to protect biodiversity, livelihoods and cultural practices.

To address environmental degradation, the declaration calls for an end to human-induced waterlogging and saline water intrusion in agricultural lands, and for a ban on unplanned, saline-water-dependent shrimp farming. It also highlights the importance of restoring river connectivity by freeing rivers from encroachment and reconnecting canals and other wetlands to prevent prolonged waterlogging.

The Khulna Declaration further recommends forming a parliamentary caucus on water and ecosystem protection. Special emphasis is placed on protecting the livelihoods of fishers dependent on rivers, wetlands, estuaries and the sea, as well as safeguarding fish breeding ecosystems.

It also advocates ecosystem-centred coastal settlement planning, focusing on reducing land, air and water pollution and conserving critical habitats through sustainable development strategies.

The closing message of the convention was delivered by Dr Md Khairul Islam, regional director for South Asia at WaterAid. "If local political leaders are engaged and demands are raised through them, and if those demands are presented in parliament through policy-making processes, some level of resolution will be possible," he said.

The closing plenary was moderated by Prof Dr Kazi Maruful Islam of Dhaka University.

Jamaat, NCP allege

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publicity and media wing, said, "In the past four days, we have observed with concern and anxiety that if these issues are not controlled, the situation may worsen further before the election."

Criticising law enforcement agencies, Zubair said complaints were lodged immediately in affected areas, but no visible action was taken.

Jamaat leaders also demanded the installation of CCTV cameras at all polling centres and urged the EC and administration to play a stronger role in ensuring a level playing field.

Meanwhile, NCP leaders also claimed that opposition groups in several constituencies are flouting regulations with little administrative intervention.

They said their Dhaka-18 candidate's campaign came under attack and warned that such incidents send a "negative signal" to the electoral process.

Following a meeting with the CEC, NCP Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah said such assaults challenge the EC's ability to

ensure a level playing field until polling day.

Meanwhile, NCP leader Ayman Raha voiced concern over security risks, saying that attacks occurring "even in the presence of candidates were deeply troubling".

He alleged that they are complying with electoral codes while their opponents are flouting the rules and that the administration remains inactive.

Ayman accused BNP's Dhaka-8 candidate of using government vehicles, saying, "When such things happen openly and no action is taken, the public becomes fearful... we realise we are not getting a true level playing field."

Earlier, in the afternoon, EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said a "level playing field" is in place ahead of the votes.

During a press briefing at the EC, Akhtar, when asked about a level playing field in the election, replied, "Of course it does. The very fact that candidates can lodge complaints and run campaigns shows that a level playing field exists. If it didn't, what would have happened?"

ICT verdict brings grief

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Ramna zone assistant commissioner Mohammad Imrul was sentenced to six years, former Shahbagh Police Station inspector Arshad Hossain to four years, and constables Md Suján Hossain, Imaz Hossain Imon and Md Nasirul Islam to three years each.

Among those present in the courtroom were the parents and maternal grandfather of one of the six victims, Shahriar Khan Anas, a Class 10 student. Before leaving home that day, Anas had written a heartbreaking letter to his mother. As the verdict was read out, his mother, Sanjida Khan, broke down. "This verdict has not delivered justice for our children," she said. "We wanted the death penalty for the accused. Is this even a verdict?" she asked.

Outside the court, her anguish deepened. "Even when there is video footage of my child's killer, he has been sentenced to only three years. Is that really justice? I lost my child. If the sentence is only three years, what message does that send? That people can kill and walk free after three years? I cannot accept this."

Grief and despair were also visible among the families of the convicted

policemen. As the verdict was announced, constables Suján and Nasirul were seen crying in the dock, while their family members wept silently.

Rahima Akhter, who lost her only son Yakub in Chankharpul and had earlier lost her husband, stood quietly among the crowd. "Since my son's death, I have lived in constant grief," she said. "The accused have been given three-year sentences. After three years, they will come out of jail. Then they will be a threat to our safety."

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said the prosecution believed the sentences were inconsistent with justice.

"Considering the way our young people sacrificed their lives in the July uprising, and after the guilt of those who directly opened fire has been proved, such light sentences are not consistent with justice."

"We will appeal and seek the death penalty for each of them. This was not ordinary murder. In crimes against humanity, it is not necessary to prove whose bullet killed whom – no one can escape punishment simply because that was not proved," he said while briefing journalists after the verdict was pronounced.

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