

## PLAYING MUJIB'S SPEECH Dhaka court denies bail to 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday denied bail to Sheikh Tasnim Afroz Emi, former vice-president of Shamsunnahar Hall Union at Dhaka University and a central vice-presidential candidate in the 2025 Ducus election, and two others in an anti-terrorism case filed over playing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech on loudspeaker.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Didarul Alam passed the order following hearing on their bail petitions, said a court staffer.

The two others are Md Asif Ahmed Shoikot, former employment affairs secretary of the banned Chhatra League's Shahidullah Hall unit of Dhaka University, and Abdullah Al Mamun, a leader of BCL's Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall unit.

Yesterday, the three were sent to jail after police produced them before the court seeking their confinement.

According to the case statement, a group of Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League activists gathered around 3:00pm on Saturday

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Thousands of people wave Iranian national flags as they gather for a rally in support of the new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei at Enghelab Square in central Tehran, Iran, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## US labels Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood as 'terrorists'

AFP, Washington

The United States said yesterday it will label the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan as a terrorist organization and accused the Islamist group of receiving support from Iran.

The designation, which will be effective in a week, comes after the United States in January declared several other Muslim Brotherhood branches to be terrorist organizations, including in its historic base of Egypt.

"The Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood uses unrestrained violence against civilians to undermine efforts to resolve the conflict in Sudan and advance its violent Islamist ideology," the State Department said in a statement.

The Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood "has contributed upwards of 20,000 fighters to the war in Sudan, many receiving training and other support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," the elite ideological wing of Tehran's military, the State Department said.

The State Department accused the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood of having "conducted mass executions of civilians in areas they captured."

Iran, run by Shia clerics, and the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni organization that historically had extensive social networks inside Egypt, both have supported Sudan's army.

## Dhaka seeks consular access

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identified, steps will be taken to bring them back to face justice, she added.

The Special Task Force (STF) of West Bengal police arrested Faisal Karim Masud, 37, the prime accused in the Hadi murder case, and his alleged associate Alamgir Hossain, 34, early Sunday from the border area of Bongaon. Faisal is a resident of Patuakhali, while Alamgir is from Dhaka.

According to the STF, the arrests followed intelligence suggesting that the two Bangladeshi nationals accused of serious crimes including murder and extortion had fled Bangladesh and entered India illegally.

Inqilab Moncho leader Hadi, who was also an independent aspirant for the Dhaka-8 constituency, was shot in Dhaka's Paltan area on December 12 last year and died on December 18 while undergoing treatment in Singapore.

On January 6 this year, the Detective Branch of police submitted a charge sheet against Faisal, four of his family members, and 12 others.

The charge sheet said analysis of the

accused persons' political affiliations and Hadi's statements suggested the killing was a result of political rivalry.

It also alleged that Faisal and his associates infiltrated Hadi's election campaign as part of a planned effort to disrupt the 13th parliamentary election by creating fear among voters.

Speaking at a briefing yesterday, Inspector General of Police Md Ali Hossain Fakir said efforts were underway through diplomatic channels to extradite the two suspects from India, expressing hope that the process would be completed soon.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed also said the government had begun steps to bring them back under the extradition treaty.

"The home ministry has already requested the foreign ministry to take the necessary steps," he told journalists after a law and order committee meeting in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

At the foreign ministry, asked how quickly the extradition could take place, Shama said it was difficult to give a definite timeline as the matter involved legal procedures in another country.

"We all want justice for Hadi; we wanted justice when it occurred, and we want it now. We hope India will cooperate with us in this matter," she said.

Responding to a question on diesel imports from India, the state minister said Bangladesh expects broader cooperation from its neighbour.

"We want diesel, we want water, and we want an end to killings at the border. We want many things," she said.

Noting that the Indian government had expressed interest in maintaining good relations with Bangladesh, she said Dhaka expected those commitments to be implemented.

"Since a new government has come to power in Bangladesh, they want to establish relations anew through mutual respect," she said.

On the repatriation of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Shama said the process was ongoing.

"Our government has just assumed office. We certainly want justice for everyone, including the trial of the former prime minister. We are working on that."

## Who is Mojtaba Khamenei?

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leader, has called upon Iranians to maintain unity and pledge support to Mojtaba Khamenei.

In a statement circulated on state media on Sunday, the assembly said that Khamenei was chosen based on a "decisive vote". It urged all Iranians, "especially the elites and intellectuals of the seminaries and universities", to "pledge allegiance to the leadership and maintain unity".

Khamenei has never run for office or been subjected to a public vote, but has for decades been a highly influential figure in the inner circle of the previous supreme leader, cultivating deep ties to the paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

In recent years, Khamenei had increasingly been touted as a top potential replacement for his father, who was president for nearly eight years and then held absolute power for 36 years, before being killed in attacks on his compound in Tehran on Saturday, February 28.

The younger Khamenei's ascension is a clear sign that more hardline factions in Iran's establishment retain power, and could indicate that the government has little desire to agree to a deal or negotiations in the short term, reports

Al Jazeera online.

Mojtaba Khamenei has never discussed the issue of succession publicly, a sensitive topic, considering that his ascension to the position of supreme leader would effectively create a dynasty reminiscent of the Pahlavi monarchy before the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Instead, Khamenei has largely kept a low profile, not giving public lectures, Friday sermons, or political addresses – to the point that many Iranians have not heard his voice, despite knowing for years that he was a star rising within the theocratic establishment.

Mojtaba Khamenei began developing close ties within the IRGC from his younger years, when he served in the Habib Battalion of the force during multiple operations in the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. Several of his comrades, including other clerics, went on to obtain leading posts in the security and intelligence apparatus of the then-nascent Islamic Republic.

Khamenei, who is under US and Western sanctions, has also amassed an economic empire involving assets in multiple countries, according to reports in Western media outlets.

His name is not believed to appear in

any of the alleged transactions, but he has reportedly moved billions of dollars over the years through a network of insiders and associates linked with the Iranian establishment.

Bloomberg tied Khamenei to Ali Ansari, who was in the spotlight late last year after his Bank Ayandeh was forcibly dissolved by the state because it went bankrupt due to handing out loans to unnamed insiders and accruing huge debts. The dissolution of the bank helped push Iran's rampant inflation higher, making Iranians poorer, as the losses had to be compensated partly through public funds.

Khamenei's religious credentials have also been an issue of contention, since he is a hojatoleslam, a mid-level cleric, rather than the higher rank of ayatollah. But his father was not an ayatollah either when he became the country's leader in 1989, and the law was amended to accommodate him. A similar compromise could be possible for Mojtaba as well.

For now, it remains unclear when or how Iran will proceed with announcing new leaders, as it once again imposes a nationwide internet blackout and restrictions on the flow of information amid an intense bombing campaign by the US and Israel across the country.

## ICDs, lighter vessels

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Together, they require 60,000–65,000 litres of diesel each day to operate container-handling equipment and transport vehicles.

BICDA Secretary General Ruhul Amin Sikder said all equipment, including reach stackers, forklifts, trailers and prime movers, are diesel-dependent.

"The oil depots aren't providing enough diesel to most ICDs as per demand," he said.

In a letter to the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, BICDA President Khalilur Rahman warned that shortages could severely disrupt exports, imports and port operations.

Meanwhile, BWTC Convener Shafiq Ahmed wrote to the energy ministry that many lighter vessels loaded with cargo are stuck on the Karnaphuli River, unable to move to outer anchorage or depart for destinations due to lack of fuel.

BWTC officials said over 70 mother vessels carrying imported cargo are currently at the outer anchorage of Chattogram Port.

To move cargo from these mother vessels to destinations across the country, the organisation allocates around 100 lighter vessels daily, which together require around 4 lakh to 5 lakh litres of fuel for completing the trip, they added.

## Diesel crunch hits farm heartlands

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country currently has 754 diesel-powered deep tube wells, 10,39,337 shallow tube wells, and 1,84,384 low-lift pumps in operation.

Boro is Bangladesh's single largest rice crop. The cultivation target this year is 50.54 lakh hectares, with 48.53 lakh hectares already brought under farming as of March 8, according to DAE data.

In the Rangpur region alone, Boro has been cultivated on 5,09,095 hectares. In five districts – Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Nilphamari and Gaibandha – 35–40 percent of cultivable land depends entirely on diesel-powered shallow machines.

Farmers in off-grid areas, particularly the chars along the Brahmaputra, Teesta and Dharla rivers, said they are struggling to keep their fields irrigated.

Mostak Ali, a farmer from Bhelabari village in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila, said he travelled 12 kilometres to obtain just two litres of diesel, although he needs around 13 litres daily to irrigate his 33 bighas of land.

In Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, Sekendar Ali of Char Jorgach said local shops have run out of diesel, forcing him to travel seven kilometres to a filling station, where he received only a fraction of what is required to irrigate his 35 bighas.

"Without adequate diesel, our Boro crop is under direct threat," he said.

Monir Hossain, a retailer in the same char, said he sold the diesel he had in stock until Sunday but has since been unable to procure more.

"Farmers and boatmen are facing severe hardship," he said.

Meser Ali, owner of a filling station

in Lalmonirhat Sadar, said they are controlling sales due to government restrictions.

Farmers, retailers and pump operators in Rajshahi, Bogura, Sylhet and Kushtia reported similar difficulties.

Tabarak Hossain, a farmer from Char Bhuban Para in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila, said electricity is unavailable in the area, leaving farmers entirely dependent on diesel.

"This is the peak time for paddy cultivation. If we cannot irrigate now, it will create a major crisis," he said.

According to DAE Rajshahi, 26,506 or about 85 percent of the district's 31,274 irrigation pumps are diesel-powered.

In Bogura's Sariakandi upazila, Abdul Gafur from Batir Char said Boro fields require irrigation two to three times a week, while other crops need watering at least once weekly.

Now, retailers are charging Tk 8–10 extra per litre for diesel, pushing the price to around Tk 110, he said.

Sirajul Islam, additional director of DAE Rangpur, warned that insufficient irrigation could seriously threaten Boro production.

He explained that in areas where irrigation depends on diesel-run shallow machines, the pumps need to operate at least 12 hours every day to supply water to all fields in an area in rotation.

"We are communicating with the ministry so farmers can get the required diesel," he said.

Farmers in remote parts of Kushtia also reported shortages. Mohammad Ali of Sonaidanga village said diesel has not been available at the Bitipara filling station for days, forcing him to

buy from local shopkeepers at Tk 20–25 more per litre.

However, Md Showkat Hossain Bhuiyan, deputy director of DAE Kushtia, said they have not yet observed a crisis of that magnitude.

In Sylhet's haor areas, farmers said the situation is becoming increasingly difficult. Sudhin Biswas of Palermura village in Moulvibazar's Hakaluki Haor said reduced rainfall caused the haor to dry earlier than usual, increasing irrigation demand.

"We need more irrigation now, but diesel is unavailable. We are in a major crisis," he said.

DAE Director General Abdur Rahim said the department is monitoring the situation at the field level.

"So far, the crisis is not severe. We will coordinate with relevant ministries to ensure farmers and pump owners receive fuel on a priority basis," he told The Daily Star, warning that prolonged supply disruptions due to the war would inevitably affect agriculture.

Jahangir Alam Khan, an agricultural economist and former director general of the Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, said the government's rationing decision is understandable given the global oil crisis.

"However, agriculture must receive top priority. Boro cultivation depends heavily on irrigation, with 62–65 percent of land using diesel-powered pumps. Diesel for irrigation should be subsidised, just like electricity for power generation," he said.

[Reporting by S Dilip Roy in Lalmonirhat, Mostafa Shabujin Bogura, Shobhanur Rahman Rafi in Rajshahi, Mintu Deshwara in Moulvibazar, and Anis Mondal in Kushtia]

## War on Iran sets off energy shocks

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export contracts after strikes on its oil facility.

With the key shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz off Iran remaining closed to almost all oil tankers, the price of benchmark crude oil contracts spiralled 10 percent to their highest levels since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Finance ministers from the G7 group were due to meet later in the day to discuss releasing strategic oil reserves to try to dampen prices, which are up around 40–50 percent since the US and Israel launched their first attacks.

US stocks followed European and Asian markets lower. All three major US indices were down at least one percent in opening trade. European stocks also slid. Japan's Nikkei index closed down more than five percent and South Korea's Kospi by nearly six percent.

Iranian state media said the Assembly of Experts, Tehran's top clerical body, had named the leader despite "the brutal aggression of the criminal America and the evil Zionist regime", then showed a missile ready for launch bearing the slogan "At your command, Sayyid Mojtaba".

Iran's security chief Ali Larjani told Khamenei that his appointment had "caused the hostile and warmongering enemies to despair."

Trump told the New York Post he was "not happy" about the appointment yesterday after telling ABC News a day before that "if he doesn't get approval from us, he's not going to last long."

After similar threats from Israel, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman warned that Beijing opposes targeting leaders and insists "Iran's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity should be respected."

Russia's President Vladimir Putin went further, sending the new supreme leader a direct message of support. "At a time when Iran is confronting armed aggression, your tenure in this high position will undoubtedly require great courage and dedication," Putin said. "Russia has been and will remain a reliable partner."

Following strikes on Bahrain's Al Ma'ameer oil facility that ignited a fire, the country's state-owned energy

company Bapco joined its counterparts in Qatar and Kuwait in declaring "force majeure" – a warning that events beyond its control may lead it to miss export targets.

The war has triggered concerns about the economies of the Gulf states, hitting their oil and gas sectors but also aviation and tourism.

Iran said that security within the strategic Strait of Hormuz could not be guaranteed for as long as the war continues.

French President Emmanuel Macron said that his country and allies were working to put together a "purely defensive" mission to reopen the strait through which nearly 20 percent of the world's crude oil usually transits.

The Saudi defence ministry said yesterday it had thwarted a drone attack targeting an oil field in the kingdom's east, near the Emirati border.

As governments around the region seek to protect their image as safe havens, Qatari authorities said they have arrested more than 300 people for sharing images online and what they described as "misleading information".

The announcement followed similar but smaller-scale arrests and warnings issued in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The war came just weeks after Iranian authorities under Ali Khamenei crushed nationwide protests against the government.

Few expect major changes in Iran's stance under the younger Khamenei, appointed to replace the cleric who led Iran for nearly four decades and who was killed in the first wave of US Israeli strikes and who is considered close to Iran's ideological armed force – the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The IRGC quickly pledged support for the new leader, saying they were "ready for complete obedience and self-sacrifice in carrying out the divine commands".

Iran's allies and proxies also rushed to express support, with the powerful Badr organisation in Iraq saying the new leadership represents "blessed continuity of the path of the Islamic revolution".

Hezbollah pledged allegiance to

Iran's new supreme leader, saying, "We extend our warmest congratulations and blessings on this occasion. We renew our pledge of loyalty to this blessed approach and our steadfastness on the path of allegiance."

Another missile was fired at NATO member Turkey, the second such incident in five days, with the alliance's air defences intercepting it before it could hit its target. Washington has advised non-essential staff to leave its consulate near the southern Turkish city of Adana and ordered US citizens to leave southeast Turkey.

More explosions were heard in Tehran and central Israel as the foes exchanged strikes. At least one Israeli was killed, a man said to be approximately 40, when shrapnel showered a building site, the Magen David Adom emergency service said. At least 10 explosions were audible in Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial hub, after the military announced it had detected missiles inbound from Iran.

The multi-front war also intensified in Lebanon. Iran-backed Hezbollah said they were engaging Israeli forces who landed in eastern Lebanon on 15 helicopters across the Syrian border and a new powerful strike hit the southern districts of Beirut.

Large plumes of smoke rose from the area after the strike, which came after the Israeli military warned it would destroy branches of Al-Qard al-Hassan, a Hezbollah-linked financial firm.

Hezbollah said combat was ongoing in eastern Lebanon after its fighters "engaged the helicopters and the infiltrating force with appropriate weapons".

Lebanon's health minister said Israeli strikes have killed at least 394 people since the start of the war, including 83 children and 42 women.

In Bahrain, the health ministry reported 32 people wounded overnight by an Iranian drone attack on the island of Sitra.

The wounded include a 17-year-old girl who suffered severe head and eye injuries and a two-month-old baby, according to the ministry.

Saudi Arabia said Sunday that two people were killed and 12 wounded as a projectile landed in Al-Kharj province.