



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and other members of the 13th parliament stand in silence during its maiden session yesterday as they unanimously adopt a condolence motion to honour former PM Khaleda Zia, July uprising victims and noted citizens at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Right top: President Mohammed Shahabuddin administers the oath to newly elected Speaker Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmad. Right bottom: Prof Muhammad Yunus, former chief adviser to the immediate past interim government, sits next to the family members of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.



PHOTO: PMO, PID

Nahid seeks justice for July victims

Says no fascist should be allowed to deliver speech in House

SATFF CORRESPONDENT



National Citizen Party Convener and Opposition Chief Whip Nahid Islam yesterday demanded justice for the victims of the July massacre, the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, and cases of enforced disappearance, murder, looting, and corruption during the past fascist regime.

"July means a country free from hegemony and fascism -- a new settlement and a democratic, inclusive, non-discriminatory Bangladesh," he said in parliament during a condolence discussion for those killed and injured in the July mass uprising.

Nahid said lawmakers were able to sit in parliament because of the sacrifices made by those who died in the uprising and urged all political actors to honour their legacy.

"We are here because of the sacrifice of the martyrs. We must show them respect," he said.

He also urged that "no fascists or their accomplices" be allowed to "contaminate" parliament by delivering speeches. "We want a fascism-free, partisan-free parliament," he added ahead of the president's speech.

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A fresh start

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Treasury members stood up as the president entered, but the opposition continued protesting.

Within a minute, as the national anthem began playing, many opposition members remained seated. At that, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir gestured to them to stand, after which the opposition members rose.

After the anthem ended, the Speaker again urged the president to deliver his speech. At that moment, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman shouted that the president had failed to act as the guardian of the state during the fascist rule.

Shahabuddin then began delivering his speech but paused briefly as opposition members chanted slogans such as "Beware, agents of fascism", "Beware, agents of dictatorship", and "Fascism and democracy cannot coexist", while holding placards with similar messages.

This was when Deputy Leader of the Opposition Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher announced the walkout.

It is customary for the president to address the maiden session of parliament, after which MPs participate in the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech.

Speaking to reporters after the walkout, Shafiqur said they had requested that "those who were allies of the fascist government" and had supported killings not be allowed to address the parliament.

"The president did not protest or take any action over the killings that occurred during his tenure, an act of grave irresponsibility toward citizens despite his role as guardian of the state."

Referring to the president's address to the nation on August 5, 2024 -- the day the Awami League government was ousted -- Shafiqur said, "The president had stated at the time that the then prime minister had resigned and that he had accepted the resignation. However, he later denied this in interviews with two media outlets and presented a different account."

This, according to the opposition leader, proved that the president had "lied to the nation".

He added that after the July uprising, the president personally signed an ordinance stating that the election would be held on February 12 and that those elected would take oath as both members of parliament and members of the reform council, with the same person administering both oaths on the same day.

Shafiqur alleged that while the opposition had taken both oaths, the ruling party had not. "The president failed to convene a session of the reform council within 30 days of the gazette publication, and this was his

responsibility."

According to the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, the first session of the Constitution Reform Council shall be summoned, in the same manner as the first session of the parliament, within 30 calendar days of the declaration of the election results.

However, while convening the parliament on February 23, the president did not mention anything about convening a session of the reform council.

The parliamentary proceedings yesterday began with the Speaker's chair vacant for a brief period -- a rare instance in Bangladesh.

The Leader of the House and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, in his introductory speech, nominated five-time BNP lawmaker Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain to preside over the inaugural session to elect the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul seconded the proposal.

About the context for nominating Mosharraf, Tarique said, "We had to nominate someone to preside over the session due to special circumstances, as the outgoing speaker and deputy speaker were either untraceable, in hiding, or in prison."

He said that traditionally the outgoing Speaker or Deputy Speaker presides over the inaugural sitting following a general poll.

However, this time, former speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury resigned, and outgoing deputy speaker Shamsul Haque Tuku is currently in prison facing a criminal charge.

The prime minister also said that after independence, senior constituent assembly member Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish presided over the inaugural proceedings on the proposal of then prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, before the election of the then speaker and deputy speaker.

Jatiya Sangsad Chief Whip Nurul Islam Moni proposed the name of Hafiz, lawmaker from Bhola-3, as the Speaker while ruling party whip Rakibul Islam, MP from Khulna-3, expressed support.

Meanwhile, another whip Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu proposed the name of Kayser Kamal, an MP from Netrokona-1, and another whip ABM Ashraf Uddin (Nizam) supported the move.

Both Speaker and Deputy Speaker were then elected unanimously through voice vote, and President Shahabuddin later administered their oaths.

After the session resumed around 12:45pm, the newly elected Speaker attempted to conduct the proceedings through the installed microphones, but sound distortion occurred due to a technical fault.

He adjourned the session for 20

minutes.

Later, in his introductory speech, Speaker Hafiz said that the parliament must become the heart of all political and administrative activities.

"We pledge to place national interest above party interest. Above all, Bangladesh must come first -- this should be our guiding principle."

He said democracy means governance by the majority. "Both the government and the opposition must unite in the national interest to fulfill the people's aspirations.

"I humbly express this hope before you. I will remain committed to ensuring that the opposition can play an effective role in this House."

Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman then placed the 133 ordinances issued by the interim government.

The ordinances were originally enacted under article 93(1) of the constitution, which allows the president to issue laws in emergency situations when parliament is not in session.

According to constitutional rules, any ordinance must be placed before the House in the first sitting of a new parliament, and these must be passed within 30 days from the start of a session, or they lose legal validity.

After placing the bills, Chief Whip Nurul Islam Moni proposed a 14-member special committee, headed by Barishal-3 lawmaker Zainul Abedin, that will scrutinise these ordinances.

The House also adopted a condolence motion expressing deep sorrow over the deaths of several national and international figures.

During the motion, discussions on the contributions of Bangladesh's three-time prime minister and BNP leader Khaleda Zia and the martyrs of the July uprising also took place.

Also yesterday, five other committees were formed.

Speaker Hafiz Uddin announced the formation of the Business Advisory Committee and the Parliamentary Committee.

Chief Whip Nurul Islam Moni proposed the names for three other committees: the Special Committee, the Committee on Privileges, and the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions. These proposals were subsequently passed by voice vote.

The session was adjourned until March 15.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday redistributed the portfolios under the Rules of Business, 1996, with the Cabinet Division issuing a gazette notification.

Ahmed Azam Khan was given the charge of the Liberation War affairs ministry, while State Minister Mir Mohammad Helal Uddin was assigned responsibility for the land ministry alongside the Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs ministry.

Khamenei vows

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should remain shut to put pressure on the enemy, he added.

On February 28, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several of his family members were assassinated on the first day of United States and Israeli strikes.

In a televised address, Khamenei called for national unity.

The resistance in Yemen "will also do the job," the supreme leader said, adding that armed groups in Iraq also "want to help" the Islamic revolution. Khamenei thanked the country's military, who he said had stopped Iran from being dominated or divided as it came under attack.

"I would like to thank the brave fighters who are doing a great job at a time when our country is under pressure and under attack," he said, and pledged that Iran would continue fighting.

Bangladesh in US trade

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Besides, Bangladesh's cement industry has significant excess capacity amid the industry's worst downturn in years, the USTR said.

In 2024, Bangladesh's national consumption of cement dropped to 38 million tonnes, which is less than 40 percent of total capacity, and it declined further the following year, the USTR added.

"It is not a comforting sight to see the country's name in the list for investigation," said Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

But, the subject matters that will be investigated -- such as production capacity, intellectual property rights and incentives -- are unlikely to affect Bangladesh to any great extent.

For instance, Bangladesh's production is based on receiving work orders from international buyers, so excessive production is not possible.

Moreover, Bangladesh has already amended the labour law last year as per the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and ratified three important ILO Conventions, making it the only country in South Asia to ratify all 10 fundamental ILO conventions.

The government has also already started phasing out incentives on export receipts as part of the preparations for smooth graduation from the least-developed country (LDC) bracket in November this year.

Regarding intellectual property rights, Bangladesh does not produce counterfeit goods to injure the market of other countries, so the investigation might not be a problem.

"We are prepared to face the investigation," he said, adding that such investigations were conducted earlier as well.

But, Bangladesh will have to maintain regular dialogue with the US so that the investigation process is not misunderstood or Bangladesh is not wrongly presented to the US in any way, he added.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said his ministry received a letter from the USTR in this regard. "We will take necessary action as per the outcomes of the investigation," he added.

It is not possible to conduct a concrete investigation and such investigations are rarely objective, said Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, also chairman of the Research and Policy Integration for Development.

For instance, Bangladeshi garment exporters send goods to the US upon receiving work orders from American retailers, brands and vendors, so excessive production is not possible, he added.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, welcomed the investigation.

"We do not have any objection to conducting the investigation. We also want the business to be conducted in a transparent way," he added.

Russia jails 15 for life over 2024 concert hall attack

AFP, Moscow

A Russian court yesterday handed life sentences to four gunmen from Tajikistan, and 11 others it said were their accomplices, for the 2024 Crocus concert hall attack that left 150 people dead.

The March 2024 shooting spree was claimed by Islamic State (IS) and was the deadliest jihadist attack in Russia in more than two decades.

Relatives of some of the victims stood in the grand Moscow military court as the verdict was read out.

Shamsidin Fariduni, Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, Makhmadsobir Fayzov and Saidakrami Rachabolzoda -- all Tajik citizens who went on a shooting

spree in the building before setting it on fire -- looked down as the judge sentenced them to life.

Eleven other men -- some Russian citizens -- were also jailed for life for acting as accomplices and of having terrorist links.

Four more men -- including a father and his sons -- were handed sentences of between 19 and 22 years over their links with the attackers.

The gunmen entered the concert hall shortly before a show by Soviet-era rock band Picnic. They went on a shooting spree before setting fire to the building, trapping many victims.

The attack wounded more than 600 people. Six children were among those killed.

PM urges cooperation

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He said he believes that political parties' opinions and programmes may differ.

"But there can be no disagreement among us when it comes to establishing an independent, sovereign, secure, and self-reliant Bangladesh free from subservience and fascism. There is no conflict on that."

Instead of making it the centre of national activities, he said, the "ousted fascist Awami League government had rendered the parliament ineffective".

"We want to transform this great national parliament into the central forum for reasoned discussion, debate and the resolution of national problems."

As the PM, he said he represents the country in the parliament and not just his party.

"Regardless of party, opinion, religion or ethnicity, I represent the people of the country. My politics is the politics of protecting the interests of the country and its people."

The politics of the BNP is focused on improving people's living standards and building a self-reliant Bangladesh, he said.

He recalled with gratitude those who lost their children, near and dear ones, those injured in the movement for democracy and human rights, as well as those who lost everything due to torture, political harassment and false cases during the fascism.

House should focus

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fascism and functioned largely as a dummy parliament," said Shafiqur, also Ameer of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

He said many who had previously served as guardians of the House had failed to uphold their responsibilities to parliament, democracy, and the rights of citizens.

Referring to the newly elected Speaker, Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, he noted that although the Speaker had been elected to parliament from a political party, he had already announced his resignation from a standing committee position of the ruling BNP.

"We believe that from now on there will be no distinction between the ruling party and the opposition in your eyes. We hope to receive justice from you," he said, adding that MPs should have the opportunity to speak on issues related to public welfare.

He also urged the Speaker to ensure that the House does not become a platform for personal attacks, noting that previous parliaments had often spent significant time on character assassination rather than discussing issues of public interest.

The opposition leader expressed confidence that the Speaker, whom he described as a valiant freedom fighter, would lead the parliament effectively and assured him of the opposition's cooperation.

Shafiqur described the current parliament not as an ordinary one, but as "a special parliament built upon the blood of '24'". "This parliament has been formed through the sacrifices of those who were oppressed over the past fifteen and a half years and those who gave their lives in the July revolution."

He expressed gratitude to Almighty Allah and thanked the people of his constituency.

He added, "I pay deep respect to the martyrs of '47, '52, '71, '75, and '90."

"Especially to those who were imprisoned in the Ayna Ghar, previously used as torture cells and secret prisons for people who were victims of enforced disappearance over the past fifteen and a half years, those who became disabled through torture, and those who gave their lives in July '24, making it possible for us to speak in this parliament."

Recalling the main slogan of the July uprising -- "We Want Justice" -- he said, "Among the three important organs of the state, parliament is the most significant. When the parliament functions properly, the other two organs -- the executive and judiciary -- will also function properly."

"Through you [the parliament], political, economic, and cultural irregularities and corruption will be eradicated from society -- this is the expectation of 180 million people."

Iranian strikes roil energy markets

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economic interests in the region, including banks, while an Iranian news agency listed tech giants as possible "future targets".

Citibank announced yesterday it would temporarily shut its branches in the UAE, a day after Iran said it considered banks and economic sites to be legitimate targets and warned Middle East residents to stay 1,000 metres from them. HSBC has shut branches in Qatar.

No senior Iranian official has floated the idea of negotiations except Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who on Wednesday, outlined three conditions to end the war: recognition of Tehran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations and firm international guarantees against future aggression. However, the demands are in themselves unattainable, said analysts.

Trump, whose Republican Party is trying to hold on to Congress in an election later this year, has repeatedly tried to calm energy markets this week by saying the war will soon be over and the surge in oil prices will be short-lived.

But he has not fully explained how the war will end, or presented a plan to reopen the blockaded strait. US and Israeli officials say the aim is to destroy Iran's missile and nuclear programmes, but Trump has also demanded Iran's "unconditional surrender" and the

power to determine its leaders.

"You never like to say too early you won. We won," Trump told a campaign-style rally in Hebron, Kentucky, on Wednesday. "In the first hour, it was over."

The United States had "virtually destroyed Iran", he said. But he added, "We don't want to leave early, do we? We got to finish the job."

He said Iran's navy and air force had been destroyed, that it was close to running out of missiles and that US forces could knock out the electricity supply "within one hour" -- leaving the country with a reconstruction that could take a generation.

But the US leader indicated that he would rather show restraint than take actions that would make it "almost impossible for them to rebuild their country."

But three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters that US intelligence indicated that Iran's leadership was still largely intact and not at risk of collapse any time soon.

Israel's military also signalled the campaign was far from finished, and that it still had "a broad bank of targets."

Pentagon officials have meanwhile briefed US lawmakers that the cost of the war exceeded \$11.3 billion in its first six days, The New York Times reported, citing people familiar with the classified

briefing.

Iran has made clear over the past two days that its strategy now is to impose a prolonged economic shock on the world to force Trump to back off.

The spokesperson for Iran's military command said on Wednesday that the world should prepare for oil prices of \$200 a barrel because of instability caused by the US. That would be well above the highest oil price in the history of \$147.27 in July 2008, weeks before the start of the global financial crisis.

Tony Sycamore, analyst at IG, said the attacks on the ships in Iraq looked like "a direct and forceful Iranian response" to the reserves release.

Meanwhile, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright yesterday said the country's military is currently "not ready" to escort tankers through the strait because all its assets are focused on striking Iran.

Trump has repeatedly sought to calm the markets by offering US Navy escorts for oil tankers and reinsurance facilities for shipping companies -- but no escorts have so far taken place.

"It'll happen relatively soon, but it can't happen now. We're simply not ready," Wright told CNBC.

He added that it was "quite likely" such escorts would be taking place by the end of the month.