

370 citizens slam

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gender identity, is entitled to equal constitutional rights, security, and dignity and that ensuring these rights is a state obligation.

On April 10, a crowd rallying under the banner of "Azadi Andolon" assaulted at least four people in Shahbagh over their perceived gender identity.

The statement listed six demands, including legal action against on-duty police personnel for "negligence"; prompt investigation and exemplary punishment for those involved in the attack; public accountability from the home minister for "failing to ensure citizens' safety"; legal action against "extremist groups" operating under the banner of "Azadi Andolon"; a clear stance of the state on the rights of gender diverse individuals and effective steps to stop hate-motivated violence; and the formulation and enforcement of an effective policy to curb harassment in the name of mobile journalism.

The signatories include economist Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University; Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori; Shirin Parveen Haque of Naripokkho; Safia Azim and Geeta Das of the same organisation; Mirza Taslima Sultana of Jahangirnagar University; artist Wakilur Rahman; former Dhaka University professor Fahmidul Haq; filmmaker Reetu Sattar; Supreme Court lawyer

Zobayer Khan; artist Razib Datta; writer and researcher Sushmita S Preetha; and Dhaka University professors Kazi Maruful Islam, Kamrul Hasan Mamun, Samina Luthia, and Moshahida Sultana, among others.

In a separate statement yesterday, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), a regional network of human rights defenders, also condemned the Shahbagh mob attack and expressed concern over the government's lack of response and the "apathy of the law enforcement".

It said mobs had been mobilised in the days leading up to the incidents through hate speech and calls for vigilante justice, yet the law enforcers failed to act.

"Police have not arrested the perpetrators despite video and CCTV footage clearly identifying them. Such inaction points to continued impunity," the statement said.

The civic platform Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee has also condemned the incident.

In a statement issued on April 12, the platform voiced concern and anger over the inaction of law enforcement agencies.

Meanwhile, one of the victims, Kazi Tahsin Agaz, yesterday told The Daily Star that many of the victims had filed a general diary online.

"We tried to file it on the day of the attack, but Shahbagh police only recorded a general complaint," he said.

Nor'wester wreaks

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named Rozina, 35, died after being struck by lightning, while another farmer was injured.

In Chuadanga's Darshana, Alimul Azim, a ninth-grader of Memnagar DB Secondary School; and Russel Hossain, 25, a farmer of Ghoshnagar village, were killed in lightning strikes.

In Meherpur's Gangni upazila, day labourer Jarjit Hossain, 50, was killed by lightning strike at Bhatpara village, according to local officials. Nine others were injured in Meherpur.

Meanwhile, in Gazipur, severe damage to agricultural crops was reported following a nor'wester storm accompanied by hail.

"Around 300 hectares of crops were destroyed in Sreepur in the storm, causing damage to nearly 1,800 tonnes of crops. Also, 300 families have been affected as numerous houses were either

Energy-focused urban

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oriented development, and energy efficiency.

He also pointed to limited use of solar energy and reliance on private transport as major challenges, warning that without immediate action, urban and energy crises will intensify.

Sajedul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Traffic and Transport Forum, noted that unplanned, reactive decisions and a lack of people-friendly infrastructure remain key barriers and emphasised organised and innovative spatial planning as the foundation for long-term development.

He recommended public transport-based mobility, integrated bus routes, shaded sidewalks, dedicated bicycle lanes, behavioral change, integrating rickshaws into modern systems, and promoting electric and hybrid vehicles.

KM Asif Iqbal, IPD research fellow and also faculty member at the State University of Bangladesh, urged for immediate approval of an effective renewable energy policy.

Dr Farhadur Reza of Jahangirnagar University said buildings account for 40-50 percent of global energy use, making green buildings and energy-efficient technologies essential.

completely or partially damaged," said Sreepur UNO Sajib Ahmed.

He added that emergency relief will be requested for the affected families. "A proposal will be made to allocate up to 30kg of rice per family. Once government allocation is received, distribution will begin immediately.

For families whose homes were destroyed, a request for corrugated iron sheets will be sent through the Deputy Commissioner to the Department of Disaster Management," he said.

Field visits revealed extensive damage in Bapta, Beildia, and Nandia Sangun villages under the upazila. Vast stretches of Boro paddy fields were seen flattened, with crops damaged completely on most fields.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Sumaiya Sultana said agricultural officials have been working to prepare list of affected farmers.

Abuse, exploitation haunt women

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most cases. For example, only 14 of the 110 agencies accused of wrongdoing last year were compelled to pay compensation.

These resolutions are frequently categorised as repatriation or administrative dismissals due to a lack of documentation and evidence, which are largely inaccessible to workers isolated in private households without access to their passports or contacts.

Several women workers who suffered abuse abroad told this newspaper that their employers took away their mobile phones immediately after they started work, cutting them off from the outside world. This is why they couldn't contact embassies or their relatives for help.

According to the WEWB annual report, 395 migrant workers received legal aid from Bangladesh missions abroad in fiscal 2024-25, and only 11 of them were women. Most of the cases were linked to harassment allegations filed by employers or foreign authorities.

When contacted, Md Ashrafuzzaman, joint secretary of the Mission and Welfare Wing at the expatriates' welfare ministry, said that safe homes overseen by Bangladesh missions abroad provide immediate protection and security to victims, support legal process, and facilitate reintegration or further employment.

He, however, acknowledged that gaps persist in implementation. At present, Bangladesh has four overseas safe homes - two in Saudi Arabia and one each in Oman and Lebanon. Though women returnees or their families can file complaints through the expatriates' welfare ministry and district BMET offices, many of them are either unaware of the procedure or choose not to take that path due to uncertainty over redress.

Only cases of human trafficking, deception or exploitation by brokers or local agents fall under the jurisdiction of police in Bangladesh, ATM Mahbub-Ul-Karim, joint secretary at the

expatriates' welfare ministry, told The Daily Star.

Migration expert Mamun Ur Rashid said that when high-skilled professionals such as doctors or engineers migrate, they receive protection under the World Trade Organization (WTO) protocols (Mode-4). Their psychological well-being, medical needs, and social status are guaranteed, with specific safeguards for dispute resolution.

"For our migrant workers, there are no such safeguards; when the state focuses only on remittance figures, it forgets that these individuals have rights," said Rashid, coordinator of the non-profit women's rights group Badabon Sangho, which facilitates 20 forums across seven districts to transform the struggles of female returnees into collective action for systemic change.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC and head of its Migration Programme, said victims of abuses abroad have no viable path to justice.

"When a woman migrant worker escapes, her attempts to file complaints are often blocked by employers who file cases on various charges including theft... As a result, embassies prioritise repatriation over justice, leaving the victim with no avenue for redress."

He emphasised that every case must be reported to host authorities to prevent further abuse. "Otherwise, one woman may return safely, but another will suffer the same fate."

Hasan noted that unlike other nations that send delegations to check on workers, Bangladesh lacks a formal follow-up system.

"Regular contact such as monthly phone calls could help... Abuse often begins the moment a migrant worker's communication with the outside world is cut off."

Criticising Bangladesh's "submissive diplomacy" in foreign agreements, Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said there

is hardly any precedent where host authorities were held accountable for abuses of women migrant workers.

"Our policy is driven by the need for dollars. The mindset is: 'Let them go any way they can, do any job, and send back dollars.' This cannot be a state policy," he said.

Rahnuma Salam Khan, national project manager of the International Labour Organization, said Bangladesh has strong rights-based frameworks on paper but enforcement is weak.

"We do not know how often agencies are penalised for unethical practices," she added.

To break the cycle of abuse, Bangladesh's labour law needs to be amended to allow migrant workers to form trade unions and associations, suggest rights activists.

They say such collective representation will help protect the rights of women migrant workers who currently do not have any bargaining power.

When contacted, Nurul Haque Nur, state minister for expatriates' welfare, acknowledged that migrant workers' rights often take a back seat due to restrictive laws and practical constraints in destination countries. "The government has not always spoken out or lodged formal protests as strongly as it should have."

However, protection of migrant workers is now a top priority, he said.

"We are engaging with destination countries to prioritise workers' safety, rights and ILO standards. Their lives, dignity and social protections will be secured.

"Previously, we lacked any mechanism for legal redress, particularly for the large number of distressed women returning from the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia. There was effectively no platform to seek justice there," he said, pointing out that the government already appointed two legal firms through its mission in Saudi Arabia to help workers pursue redress and compensation.

The ministry will ensure stricter oversight of recruitment agencies through a new grading system, he added.

Dark hand

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siphoned off abroad in the past, no effective initiatives have been taken to recover the money. He also alleged that efforts to bring those responsible under law have been stalled.

The Jamaat chief said there was a political interference in the process of changes in the central bank's leadership, which he described as risky for the country's financial system. He added that even a loan defaulter has been given the scope to reschedule loans and be appointed to a key position.

He urged people to remain vigilant and act as "guardians" to protect their deposits.

The opposition leader said there are inconsistencies in the government's statements on the energy situation, adding that while the government claims that there is no energy crisis, prolonged load-shedding, and public suffering in buying fuel suggest otherwise.

According to him, the energy shortage is putting industries at risk due to a lack of furnace oil, while rising transport costs are driving up commodity prices.

The Jamaat ameer also alleged that extortion is adding further pressure on people.

Regarding the walkout of the House, the opposition leader said although the Speaker pledged neutrality on the first day of the parliament session, the opposition did not see that in practice. They were compelled to walk out as they were not given the scope to speak on important issues.

He expressed dissatisfaction over the limited time allocated for parliamentary debate.

"No parliamentary debate can take place in two minutes, in which one can only make a comment," he said, adding that although the time was later slightly increased, it remained insufficient, while treasury bench lawmakers were allowed extended speaking time.

Shafiqur said global situations, caused by US-Israel war on Iran, have impacted Bangladesh, internal weaknesses and policy failures have worsened the crisis. He called on the government to engage in open discussions, both in and outside parliament, to find solutions in the national interest.

He added that necessary steps must be taken to implement the referendum verdict, and reform ordinances should be presented in parliament as bills in line with public expectations.

The Jamaat chief also warned that ignoring public opinion would undermine democratic practices and could lead to a bigger crisis in future.

"The culture in which the party is bigger than the country must change," he said, calling for collective efforts to address the crisis.

Delhi reviewing

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there have been efforts from both sides to improve relations.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman recently visited New Delhi and held meetings with several top ministers, including Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar.

He also requested Hasina's extradition.

"I would also like to emphasise that the external affairs minister reiterated India's desire to engage constructively with the new government and further strengthen bilateral ties," Jaiswal said.

"The two sides agreed to explore proposals for deepening the partnership through the relevant bilateral mechanisms," the spokesperson said.

He said official meetings are expected to take place at an early date for both sides' views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, Jaiswal said.

Experts urge front

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The speakers stressed that FOPL is an effective way to raise awareness, as such labelling enables consumers to easily identify food items high in salt (sodium), sugar, or saturated fat and make healthier dietary choices accordingly.

They also called for swift approval and implementation of a draft regulation to introduce mandatory FOPL, prepared by the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA).

Around 97 percent people in Bangladesh consume packaged food at least once a week, but most struggle to understand the complex nutritional information provided on the back of packages, limiting their ability to assess health risks, they added.

The speakers argued that clear FOPLs would enable consumers to make informed decisions and choose healthier foods.

Globally, 44 countries that introduced FOPL, including 10 making it mandatory, have reported greater consumer awareness and reduced consumption of unhealthy

food, they noted. BFSA member Prof Mohammad Shoaeb expressed hope that the government's initiative to introduce FOPL would be implemented soon.

Abu Ahmed Shamim, associate scientist at the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, said FOPL can help consumers make healthier choices and lower the risk of NCDs by reducing dependence on ultra-processed foods.

Samina Israt, programme officer (diet-related risk factors) at the World Health Organization (WHO), said introducing FOPL aligns with Bangladesh's national health and nutrition policies and will help create a supportive food environment that promotes healthy eating habits.

Muhammad Ruhul Quddus, Bangladesh country lead of GHAI, said implementing FOPL would help lower healthcare costs for both the government and individuals.

Dhaka Tribune Editor Riaz Ahmed called for continued media coverage to press policymakers for introducing FOPL.

No chaos over

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Rangpur, and Faridpur divisions were interviewed. More than 400 aspirants took part.

A member of the Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal from Ranisankail upazila in Thakurgaon said Tarique Rahman and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir conducted the interviews. There was no fixed time for each aspirant, she added.

Requesting anonymity, the woman leader said she was asked what she would do if not selected and whether she would remain with the party.

Several leaders said they had struggled over the past 17 years and hoped the party would evaluate their contributions.

They also assured the board they would accept the party's final decision.

Party insiders said the BNP parliamentary board, including standing committee members, asked aspirants about their reasons for seeking nomination, their contributions to the party and their constituencies, and their roles in movements.

They were also asked about their priorities if elected, past experience as public representatives, whether they would support the party's nominee, and what they would do if denied nomination.

Speaking to reporters, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the party will prioritise the contributions of

women leaders, especially their roles during the past 15-16 years of political struggle.

He said many women leaders faced harassment, including cases, attacks, and intimidation during that period.

Educational background, ability to speak in parliament, and knowledge of lawmaking will also be considered, he added.

The interviews were conducted under the leadership of Tarique Rahman, with standing committee members Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Nazrul Islam Khan, Salahuddin Ahmed, Selima Rahman, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and AZM Zahid Hossain present.

Party sources said around 1,300 nomination forms were sold over three days, of which nearly 900 have already been submitted.

Aspirants from Chattogram, Sylhet, Cumilla, Dhaka, and Mymensingh divisions are scheduled to be interviewed today, they added.

According to the Election Commission, there are 50 reserved women's seats in parliament. EC estimates that the BNP-led alliance will secure 36 seats, the Jamaat-led alliance 13, and independents one.

Nomination submission ends April 21, scrutiny will take place on April 22-23, and voting is scheduled for May 12.

Scrap 'anti-state' US

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Bangladesh to import unnecessary items, such as Boeing aircraft and weapons, at exorbitant prices.

Stressing that parliament must ratify any international treaty for it to take effect, he placed a three-point demand.

They include immediate discussion and cancellation of the deal, publication of a white paper detailing the damages caused by the interim government and accountability for those responsible, and building national capacity for oil and gas exploration instead of relying on foreign companies.

Addressing the rally, researcher Maha Mirza termed the deal a "national betrayal". She warned that it would force Bangladesh to import \$15 billion worth of LNG exclusively from the

US over the next 15 years, posing serious risks to the local energy sector.

She also cautioned that duty-free imports of US frozen beef, chicken, eggs, and powdered milk under the agreement will systematically destroy the local poultry and dairy industries.

Calling the agreement an act of "US subservience", she urged the government to show resolve, citing Malaysia as an example, and scrap the deal.

Dhaka University Associate Professor Musahida Sultana, Democratic Rights Committee's Mymensingh district representative Abul Kalam Al Azad, and physician Harun or Rashid also addressed the rally, which was moderated by rights activist Mahtabuddin Ahmed.

UPDF's youth wing

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Democratic Youth Forum.

In the statement, the UPDF blamed the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), led by Santu Larma, for the killing. However, PCJSS denied the allegation.

Talking to this newspaper, Sajib Chakma, assistant information and

publicity affairs secretary of PCJSS, said he learned of the death through social media, adding that there was no question of their organisation being responsible for the incident.

Protesting the murder, UPDF activists blocked the Rangamati-Khagrachhari regional highway for an hour.