

Protesters march during a demonstration calling for the removal of undocumented immigrants in Alexandra township in the Gauteng province of South Africa yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

SC stays Hafizur's bail

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the case, from his house in Dhaka's Keraniganj on April 22, more than a decade after the killing.

The High Court on August 2 granted him six months' ad-interim bail and issued a rule asking the state to explain why he should not be granted permanent bail.

Hafizur, the only accused arrested in the case, was released from Cumilla Central Jail on August 4.

According to the investigating officer, DNA samples were collected from Hafizur following his arrest, and the test report has since been submitted to the court.

Tonu, a history student at Cumilla Victoria Government College and a theatre activist, was raped and murdered inside Cumilla Cantonment on March 20, 2016.

Although two autopsies were conducted at Cumilla Medical College Hospital, the cause of her death could not be determined. However, officials of the Criminal Investigation Department later confirmed through DNA testing that she had been raped before being murdered.

Saifuzzaman Chy owns 33 properties

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Malaysia, Cambodia, India, Thailand and Vietnam.

The commission has also moved against Javed's assets in Britain. In February, a court ordered the seizure of 518 flats and apartments in his name valued at £271,852,872.

In March last year, the same court froze 39 bank accounts and ordered the seizure of shares in 23 companies linked to him, according to media reports.

Javed left Bangladesh for London in August, 2024, shortly before the fall of the Awami League government.

The ACC has since accused him of laundering money abroad to purchase hundreds of overseas properties and has filed multiple corruption and money-laundering cases against him, his wife Rukhmila Zaman, and associates.

Weakened Padma obstructs irrigation

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and Chuadanga and adjoining districts in the southwest region.

Uninterrupted water supply to the GK Project area depends on the Padma's water flow, which has dropped steadily since the Farakka Barrage came into operation in 1975.

After a water-sharing treaty between Bangladesh and India in 1996, the project area started receiving some water. However, the quantity often goes down as India withdraws Ganges water upstream, said an official of the Water Development Board (WDB).

Because of the depleted river levels, the massive GK intake pumps were forced into complete shutdowns to avoid mechanical disaster many times in the past, said Md Mizanur Rahman, executive engineer of the GK Project Pump Station.

A minimum water level of 4.20 metres in the Padma is needed to run the pumps. When the river level drops below this level, particularly during the dry season, it is not possible to run the pumps, he added.

The GK Project was designed with a network of 193km of main canals, 467km of secondary canals, and 995km of tertiary canals.

Although all the main canals are still operational, around half of the secondary and tertiary canals have already become unusable due to the water crisis, said locals.

The project officials said they carry out routine dredging work in the canals, but it requires a comprehensive and large-scale dredging project to make all the canals operational again.

The ecological decline of the Padma began in 1975 following the commissioning of the 2,304m-long Farakka Barrage across the Ganges River in West Bengal, India.

Situated upstream, the barrage drastically reduced the volume of water entering downstream Bangladesh during the critical dry season.

To mitigate the escalating crisis, Bangladesh and India signed a historic 30-year Ganges Water-Sharing Treaty in 1996 that is going to end this year.

Under the agreement, India is supposed to discharge a specific amount of water depending on water flow in the upstream during the dry season from January to May every year.

A joint team of officials from both countries monitors the quantities of water discharge at the Farakka point in India and Hardinge Bridge point in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh got the highest volume of water in January 1998 when India discharged more than 2 lakh cusecs of water at Farakka point and Bangladesh got about 1.82 lakh cusecs at Hardinge Bridge point.

And the lowest was in March 1997 when India discharged only 48,487 cusecs of water and Bangladesh got 13,823 cusecs, according to the data of Joint River Commission (JRC).

JRC data shows that the quantities varied from year to year.

As per the treaty conditions, the water-sharing formula becomes ineffective if the discharge at the Farakka point falls below 50,000 cusecs, said Md Shibber Hossain, executive engineer of the North Bengal Hydrological Division of WDB in Pabna.

It requires a minimum flow of 30,000 cusecs of water at the Hardinge Bridge point to keep the Padma alive, he added.

"The flow of water in the Padma river depends on the amount of water discharged at the Farakka point. If the upstream flow is low, Bangladesh automatically receives a reduced share."

The diversion of water upstream through several canals in India caused the long-term depletion of water in the Padma, he added.

The landmark 1996 Ganges Water Treaty is set to expire in December this year.

While Dhaka has initiated renewal talks with New Delhi, water experts and local officials are urging policymakers to negotiate stronger legal guarantees to safeguard water flow into Bangladesh.

The existing framework is outdated and fails to account for today's environmental realities, Najmul Islam, dean of the faculty of life and earth science at Pabna University of Science and Technology, told The Daily Star.

The treaty prioritises only the water-sharing issue instead of protecting the entire ecosystem.

The existing treaty permits the distribution of the total volume of water. But around 35 to 40 percent of a river's natural flow must be guaranteed to sustain its existence, and the remaining water should be distributed, he added.

11-party goes for long marches

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October 10.

A rail march from Dhaka to Sylhet is scheduled for October 24, followed by a grand rally in the capital on November 14.

The movement would continue until their demands are met, Shafiqur said.

"The newly announced long marches are aimed at realising the people's demands -- they should not be obstructed as in the past. If obstacles are created, the marches will reach their destinations with twice the momentum," he said.

Among those present at the programme were Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader Oli Ahmad and National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam, who also serves as the opposition chief whip.

At the rally, Shafiqur read out the alliance's 11-point charter of demands.

"We are here today to place these 11 demands in the hands of the people. These demands do not belong to any party, individual or group -- they are meant to protect the rights of 18 crore people."

In an apparent reference to the Awami League, the opposition leader said: "Those who silenced dissent with bullets, killings, enforced disappearances, repression, forced displacement and the destruction of businesses will never again be allowed to assert themselves in this country while we are alive."

Addressing the gathering, NCP Convener Nahid Islam said the Monsoon Revolution took place in 2024 and if necessary, it will happen again in 2026.

"That depends on the government's behaviour. If the BNP government, if Tarique Rahman's government, cannot ensure people's basic rights -- gas, electricity, employment and affordable commodities -- then it should not dream of remaining in power."

Nahid also accused the government of failing to fulfil its election pledge of creating employment.

The activists of the ruling party's student wing are attacking opposition student organisations and attempting to establish control over university campuses, he said.

"Those who participated in the July uprising are still active on campuses, and no new form of domination will be allowed," he added.

The sit-in, held on the last working day of the week, drew thousands of activists from Jamaat and other alliance partners. Heavy traffic congestion in surrounding areas caused severe disruption and suffering for commuters.

At the end of the programme, Shafiqur announced that alliance leaders and activists would march on foot towards the Secretariat.

"This Secretariat does not belong to any political party. Every brick, stone, rod and bag of cement belongs to the people of this country. Those sitting there -- ministers and MPs alike -- must listen to the people and heed their demands. Our demands today are simple: we want gas in our kitchens. Stop making our mothers cry. We want electricity in every home. Stop making false statements in parliament. We want safe drinking water and adequate gas supplies for transportation."

Alleging that the government was deliberately creating a crisis to justify price hikes, Shafiqur said: "You have already increased LPG prices -- withdraw that decision. If you do not, we will be forced to lay siege to the relevant offices. We understand the manoeuvre to increase gas prices. Creating shortages is the first step, followed by price hikes. We will not allow that to happen, God willing."

After the sit-in, leaders and activists of the alliance headed towards the Secretariat to press their demands, but police stopped them near Gate No. 1 and shut the other entrances.

A brief scuffle broke out between police and protesters.

Alliance leaders, including Shafiqur, then addressed supporters from outside the Secretariat.

Initially, the Jamaat chief gave the government 10 minutes to send a representative, assuring that no one would be disrespected.

When no representative arrived within the deadline, he expressed disappointment and said: "We are leaving for today."

Time to deliver on 'rainbow nation' pledge

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She also recommended taking immediate steps to adopt a government policy to ensure that tourism development in indigenous areas does not disrupt their way of life and respects their culture and traditions.

Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum General Secretary Sanjeeb Drong said the government's vision of an inclusive and humane society has brought new hope, but implementation was now crucial.

"The present government speaks of building a 'rainbow nation' -- an inclusive and humane society that offers indigenous peoples new hope and inspiration. But unless those promises are translated into reality, we will once again fall behind. Discrimination cannot be eliminated if they are left behind," he said.

Echoing the call, ALRD Executive Director Shamsul Huda urged the government to officially observe the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

He said Bangladesh officially participates every year in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), but does not officially observe the international day at home.

Special guest lawmaker Anna Minz said that while the deprivation faced by indigenous peoples is widely acknowledged, the progress made should also be recognised.

Describing the inclusion of indigenous rights in the ruling party's election manifesto and other policy documents as significant progress, she urged all stakeholders to focus on advancing indigenous communities further in the years ahead.

"The government's initiatives, from the national budget to other development programmes, are positive and will play an important role in improving the lives of indigenous peoples," she said.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said indigenous peoples should be granted constitutional recognition "without any debate".

He called for constitutional amendments to protect the rights of indigenous and ethnic minority communities, alleging that vested interests had exploited divisions within the communities to weaken their position.

He also said the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord had remained only partially implemented because of the influence of a powerful quarter.

Calling for effective measures to protect indigenous peoples' constitutional rights, land security and cultural identity, he said safeguarding their rights was essential to building an inclusive, discrimination-free state.

Lawmaker Madhabi Marma pledged to work towards ensuring mother-tongue education for indigenous children and said relevant ministries were working to expand and strengthen indigenous cultural institutes.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Fauzia Moslem called for recognition of indigenous midwives' traditional knowledge and contributions to healthcare. She also urged the government to ensure maternal, newborn and general healthcare services for indigenous communities, saying their culture and society are deeply connected to their land.

Other speakers demanded greater representation of indigenous communities in development activities, including eco-tourism projects in their areas. They also urged the government to ensure implementation of Section 97 of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950, with additional deputy commissioners (revenue) taking proactive steps to protect indigenous land rights.

Partial FSRU

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The situation has improved," said Mohammad Rafiq Khan, deputy general manager of Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Ltd.

Chattogram's normal daily gas demand is around 350 mmcfd, but supply had fallen to around 190-200 mmcfd in recent days following the July 21 incident at the Maheshkhali terminal.

The improvement was visible at CNG stations in the city yesterday, where queues were significantly shorter than in previous days.

The disruption began on July 21 when a fire at the Excelerate-operated FSRU damaged systems linked to its boiler operations, cutting around 450 mmcfd of gas supply to the national grid. The terminal has remained largely out of operation since then.

Petrobangla officials said the partial restart was the first step towards restoring the terminal's full capacity. Engineers are continuing repair work, with replacement equipment being brought in from overseas.

Power and Energy Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmood Tuku yesterday said gas supply could take another two to three days to return to normal.

He also said Bangladesh had asked India to increase diesel supplies through the existing cross-border pipeline.

"We have a pipeline with India through which diesel comes. We have asked them to provide more," the minister told reporters at the Secretariat.

The Bangladesh-India Friendship Pipeline connects Numaligarh Refinery in Assam with Parbatipur in Dinajpur and has an annual supply arrangement of up to 180,000 tonnes of diesel.

Bangladesh's gas demand is currently around 3,800 mmcfd, while supply to the national grid has typically remained around 2,600 mmcfd.

Appoint capable, impartial

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Information (RTI) Act, 2009, the committee recently invited applications from qualified and interested candidates for the three posts.

Welcoming the move, the forum said the selection process presents an opportunity to fulfil the long-standing public expectation of an independent and effective Information Commission.

The forum said effective implementation of the Right to Information Act depends on a competent, impartial and citizen-oriented commission.

It urged the selection committee to assess candidates not only on their ability to discharge the responsibilities prescribed under the law but also on their competence, objectivity and impartiality to perform their duties independently, free from all forms of influence.

The letter was signed by Shaheen Anam, convener of RTI Forum and executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, on behalf of the forum's core group members. They are: Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shujan; Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB; Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of COAST Trust; Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of BILS; AHM Bazlur Rahman, chief executive officer of Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication; Zakir Hossain, chief executive of Nagorik Uddyog; Ananya Raihan, chairperson of iSocial; Barrister Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST; Rafiqul Islam Khokon, executive director of Rupantar; Hasibur Rahman, executive director of MRDI; Ruhi Naz, deputy director of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh; and Hamidul Islam Hillol, project manager of the Tobacco Tax Project at the Bureau of Economic Research, Dhaka University.

Still denied meaningful role

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Describing indigenous society as "a society of heroes", Sarkar said the struggle to protect ancestral land, culture and fundamental rights is not donor-driven or event-based but a fight for survival.

Rights activist Shanjida Khan Ripa said patriarchal social structures lie at the heart of women's marginalisation.

She said women elected to reserved seats represent three wards but receive significantly smaller budget allocations than male members representing a single ward.

The denial of property rights further weakens women's economic position and limits their influence in local decision-making, she added.

Semonty Monjari, strategic coordinator at NETZ, said meaningful empowerment requires sustained investment in girls' education and leadership from an early age.

Without genuine institutional reforms, she said, increasing the number of women representatives would remain largely symbolic.

Advocate John Gomes, a member of Bangladesh Indigenous Committee, said indigenous women face the dual challenge of ethnic marginalisation and gender discrimination.

He described the election of 11 indigenous women representatives as an encouraging precedent and said expanding their representation in union parishads, municipalities and district councils would strengthen transparency and accountability in local governance.

Speaking as chief guest, Anna Minj, MP, praised grassroots women representatives for overcoming systemic barriers to serve their communities.

While highlighting government initiatives for the socio-economic development of plainland indigenous people, she urged indigenous communities to take greater responsibility by addressing internal social issues, resolving organisational feuds and tackling challenges such as substance abuse.

The discussion, moderated by Tanjim Ferdous, head of strategic partnerships at The Daily Star, also featured elected indigenous and Bengali women representatives from Joypurhat.

Presidential election on August 20

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would be completed in line with the announced schedule.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin resigned on July 24. Following his resignation, Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad has been discharging duties as acting president.

As per the constitution and the President Election Act 1991, the EC is required to hold the presidential election within 90 days of the vacancy. The chief election commissioner will be the returning officer of the polls.

On July 28, election commissioners, led by CEC AMM Nasir Uddin, held preliminary discussions with acting speaker Kayser Kamal.

Following the meeting, the CEC said, "If there are multiple candidates, voting will take place openly in the parliament. If there is only one valid candidate, he or she will be declared elected unopposed."

By law, the nomination paper must have a proposer and a seconder who are MPs. When submitting the nomination form, the candidate must also be accompanied by an MP.

On election day, the CEC presides over the session. No other parliamentary business may take place that day, and voting can begin only after noon.

MPs must cast their votes in the parliament chamber before the election officer using prescribed ballot papers. They must mark the name of their preferred candidate and sign the ballot paper.

To collect a ballot paper, MPs must sign the counterfoil. Each member of parliament has only one vote. The Speaker, as a member of parliament, is also entitled to vote.

After voting ends, the CEC counts the votes publicly. In case of a tie, the result is determined by lottery among the candidates.

According to article 48(4) of the constitution, a Bangladeshi citizen aged 35 or above can collect the signatures of two members of parliament and apply for the presidential election. No nomination fee is required to apply for the post of head of state in Bangladesh.