

Wounded Bangladesh protesters receive robotic helping hand

AFP- Squeezing rubber-covered robotic prosthetic hands, Bangladesh protesters wounded during the deadly revolution to topple autocratic leader Sheikh Hasina test out replacement arms for their lost limbs.

"I'll be able to do some everyday tasks with this artificial hand," said student Hafeez Mohammad Hossain, 19, whose right hand was ripped off in gunfire on August 5.

It was the same day protesters stormed Hasina's palace as she fled to India by helicopter.

In the middle of the chaos, Hossain said a police officer levelled a shotgun at him and fired. He described searing pain as gun pellets lacerated his back and leg.

Surgeons picked out the gunshot, but were unable to save his hand.

"I can't write anymore," Hossain said. "I'm struggling to learn how to write with my left hand."

On Thursday he was fitted with a prosthetic limb, alongside four other students who also lost their hands during the months-long protests in which at least 700 people were killed during a police crackdown.

Robolife Technologies, a Bangladeshi organisation manufacturing artificial hands, said the prosthetic limbs use sensors connected to the nerves to move.

The company says it allows users to grasp objects, to type and use a phone.

"If you ask me whether they work like organic hands, I'd say

no,” said Antu Karim, who is working on the government-backed project to fit the limbs.

“But these hands allow the boys to hold a glass if thirsty, or a spoon to eat,” he added. “At least, they won’t be looked down upon for not having hands.”

– ‘Rely on others’ –

Hasina’s 15-year tenure saw widespread human rights abuses, including the mass detention and extrajudicial killings of her political opponents.

Limbless protesters held a rally earlier this month demanding the interim government who took over after Hasina’s fall support those injured in the protests.

Many say they have not received the aid they need.

The four other former protesters who had arms fitted on Thursday included Mohammad Mamun Mia, 32, a father of two, whose hand was hacked off by a gang he said was loyal to Hasina’s Awami League party.

The new arm is far from perfect, but it has made a huge difference.

“I’ll be able to do some regular tasks with this hand,” he said, saying that while he cannot work driving a tractor in the fields again, he hopes now to open a small business.

Arif Hossain Sagar, 19, had his hand amputated after it failed to heal from an injury he sustained during the protests, and doctors worried about gangrene.

“I can’t do any regular activities now,” Sagar told AFP. “I rely on others for eating or bathing.”

The new hand will return a degree of normality to his life, he said.

Nayeem Hasan, wounded when attackers pounced on him as he went to donate blood to help those injured after a fire, broke into tears.

The new arm would help him fulfil his simple dream.

“I have a one-year-old daughter who wants me to hold her,” Hasan said.

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