

45 newsmen attacked, 9 arrested last year

UNB, Dhaka

Murders, attacks, kidnappings, blackmailing and death threats made the year 2000 a bleak one for press freedom in Bangladesh, says a report of Reporters' Sans Frontiers (RSF).

In its Bangladesh chapter report, released ahead of World Press Freedom Day, RSF said more than 45 journalists were attacked, nine arrested and about 20 threatened during the period.

The violence affected all sectors of the media: publishing and broadcasting, national and local, public and private, in Bengali or in English.

Mentioning that journalists working for publications owned by political parties were prime targets for attack, the report said some publications are highly opinionated, defending the interests of the two main political groups: the ruling Awami League and BNP.

Two journalists were killed in Bangladesh in 2000. They were Janakantha reporter and BBC stringer Shamsur Rahman and a local daily editor Mir Ilias Hossain.

Journalists detained by police were Mohiuddin Murad of Janakantha, Mosharraf Hossain Kamal of Dainik Dinkal, Aminur

Rahman Taj and Rafiqul Alam of Ajker Kagoj, Shakhawat Hossain Badshah of Matribhumi, Mahfuzur Rahman of Janata and Sujit Nandi of Arthaneeti.

Journalists came under attacks were Shahriar Kabir, Anwar Hossain of Banglabazar Patrika, Zakir Hossain Sumon of Ajker Kagoj, Shahadat Hossain Bachchu of Bhurer Kagoj, Mohsin Hossain Babul of Ajker Sathkira, Mohsin Ali Angur, MA Mamun, Abdus Samad Jewel, Akhil Poddar of Janakantha, Ainul Haque, Ahsanul Kabir of Dinkal, Ahmed Abid and Serajuddin, Masudur Rahman Ratan of Banglar Bani, Kamal Mehdi, Moniruzzaman Monir, Ekramul Haq Bulbul of Prothom Alo, Nur Muhammed, MA Motalleb, Kazi Borhan Ahmed, Sheikh Mamunur Rashid, Al Amin Shahriar of Manab Zamin, Anwar Zahid, Abdus Salam of Inqilab, Shorab Alam of Sangbad, Molla Abdur Rob of Janmobhumi, Haris Mohammad of Manab Thikana, Supan Rai of Ekushey TV, Tanvir Mahmud of Bangladesh Observer, Mahbub Zaman Nahid of The Daily Star, Imtiaz Alam of UNB, Anisur Rahim of Satkhirar Chitra, Giasuddin of Ajker Barta and Shafiuddin Ahmed.

Progress in Kashmir talks

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to his invitation. India, however, refuses to invite Islamabad to the ongoing talks with Kashmir's separatists.

The Indian government offered an unilateral ceasefire in November last year and extended it until May 31 in a bid to kick-start a dialogue with the region's more than two dozen militant groups, political parties and separatist organisations.

Kashmir's Shabir Shah is the first key separatist leader to respond to Pant's open invitation.

Muslim-majority Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947 but is claimed by both.

Meanwhile, six Muslim militants were killed Thursday in a gun-battle with Indian soldiers in Indian-administered Kashmir, a defence ministry spokesman said.

He said the rebels were shot in a

gun-battle with soldiers in jungle near Cobra Chapadian village in the border district of Mandi, some 250 kilometres (150 miles) northwest of Kashmir's winter capital Jammu.

He added that troops had cordoned off the area to cut off possible escape routes for the militants. "The pitched gun-battle battle continues," he said.

Away in Muzaffarabad, one person was killed and eight others wounded Thursday in a bomb attack at a cinema in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, police here said.

Police said the bomb was apparently planted in the cinema in Bela Nur Shah district of Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistan-controlled part of the divided Himalayan state.

Police and ambulances rushed to the scene but no other details were immediately available.

2 EPZs earn US\$875m

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Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, State Minister for Shipping Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, State Minister for Energy Prof Rafiqul Islam, members of the governing board and secretaries concerned were present in the meeting.

The meeting was appraised that exports from the EPZs in last five years amounted to 3,547 million US dollars as against cumulative exports of last 13 years amounting to 1054 million dollars, registering a growth of 336 per cent.

Besides, investment in the EPZs till 1995-96 was 197 million dollars, which shot up to 270 million dollars in last five years, some 137 per cent higher than the cumulative investment till 1995-96.

In view of the growing interest of foreign and local investors, the government has decided to set up four new EPZs at Mongla, Comilla, Iswardi and Uttara at a cost of Tk

300 crore. Some 700 industrial plots would be created and developed in these zones.

The meeting was told that all industrial plots and factory buildings in Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs were allocated to foreign and local investors.

Prime Minister Hasina suggested that all EPZs should have dormitories for female workers along with other facilities.

The meeting took a number of decisions facilitating entrepreneurs to set up their units in the export processing zones against the backdrop of successes already achieved.

The decision included reduction in the rent of each industrial plot at Mongla, Iswardi and Uttara EPZs at 1 US dollars per square metre instead of 2 US dollars and 1.25 US dollars per square metre for factory building. The facility would be given for the first 10 years.

Bangabandhu murder

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that they were yet to get certified copies of Monday's verdict and the split verdict to prepare their appeal.

As per law, to file a leave petition for appeal, an accused gets 30 days time from the date of obtaining the certified copy of the death sentence confirmed by the High Court.

In the split verdict, Justice Ruhul Amin acquitted five of the 15 accused while Justice ABM Khairul Huq upheld the trial court verdict which sentenced all the 15 to death.

The judges however differed on the death sentence of one of the accused -- Captain (Rtd) Abdul Mazed -- on relevant sections of law.

The matter was then referred to a third judge on January 14.

Justice Karim in his verdict on Monday acquitted three of the accused and confirmed the death sentence of 12 including Lt Col (Rtd)

Mohiuddin Ahmed and Risaldar Moslemuddin who were acquitted by Justice Ruhul Amin.

The APD also deferred a decision on another petition filed by Bazul Huda seeking treatment outside the Dhaka Central Jail.

The court said it will give its order after examining relevant provisions of the Jail Code.

The petition was moved by his lawyer Advocate Mahbubur Rahman MP. The accused, now in condemned cell, complained that he was suffering from kidney disease and other ailments and that he was not given proper treatment by the jail authorities.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam refuted the allegations.

Out of the 12, four are in the death row of the Dhaka Central Jail.

They are Maj (Rtd) Huda, Lt Col (Rtd) Shariar Rashid Khan, Lt Col (Rtd) Syed Faruqur Rahman and Lt Col (Rtd) Mohiuddin Ahmed. The rest are absconding, believed to be out of the country.

RAW

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probably one of the first to mention that the "land that the BDR captured probably belonged to Bangladesh".

Other newspapers have also condemned the Indian Government for failing to ratify the agreement between Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman and Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1974 over the border dispute. The *Outlook* writes, "While Dhaka ratified the treaty immediately after the Mujib-Indira pact was signed in 1974, New Delhi is yet to react upon it."



PHOTO: STAR

State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed giving away the PIB-UNICEF Feature Awards among the winners in the city yesterday.

How Indian media covered

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defiling of the dead Indian soldiers...is beyond the pale of civilised conduct between states. Irrespective of the cause of conflict and who started it, there is a set of internationally accepted norms in dealing with uniformed soldiers.

India must strain every nerve to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime to book."

But, he hastens to add, "The rhetoric of retribution is cheap. The call for toughness is very well.... Even tougher is to own up to the misadventure on our own part that led to botched up operations of the Border Security Force. We owe it to ourselves as a nation to determine where mistakes were made in handling the border crisis last week.

"The calls for retaliation may certainly appear to be in tune with the harsh public mood angered by pictures of Indian soldiers being

carried as carcasses by Bangladeshis. But in letting anger overtake judgement, the BJP affiliates are all set to inflict serious injury on national security."

Similar was the refrain of Jyoti Malhotra, foreign policy analyst, in her article in the Indian Express.

Manoj Joshi, another foreign policy and security expert, says in an article in The Times of India, "If Dhaka has to be blamed for criminal adventurism, New Delhi cannot be absolved of adventurist incompetence." The Indian government "has been right in urging restraint and ensure that the situation does not play into the hands of anti-India elements who may have engineered the incidents," Joshi adds.

Raja Mohan says, "Those who cannot ask the simple question who benefits from the confrontation between India and Bangladesh are destined to act as pawns for the

nation's worst adversaries."

There is general agreement among editorial writers and analysts that the coming general elections and anti-India quarters in Bangladesh could be behind the border tension. "India-bashing is something of a permanent feature at election time," says an editorial in the Indian Express.

"It pays to whip up anti-India sentiments at a time like this to score an electoral point," comments another national daily, Hindustan Times.

The Indian print media agrees that the recent border skirmishes serve as a wake-up call to both countries to lend a sense of urgency to address the root of border tension by working more expeditiously for a faster resolution of border-related disputes.

Press freedom

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street agitation, religious bigots and even policemen taming street protesters were also found involved in assaulting the pressmen.

Although the print media enjoys a certain degree of freedom, the electronic media is yet to break free from influence of government that absolutely dominates the state-owned radio and television, and closely monitors the private ones.

While the administration is not overtly hostile to independent media, government leaders are often heard speaking about accountability of the journalists in a clear interference into the role of independent media. Reports have it that a section of the politicians in the government and the opposition as well often take advantage of their personal relations to influence the journalists.

Although the country's constitution guarantees the freedom of press, it defines this freedom "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the state security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality." This gives the government enormous discretionary powers.

District officials still have broad authority to cancel publishing licenses under the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1974. In November last year, the Dhaka district magistrate ordered the closure of a pro-BNP weekly magazine called Evidence on grounds that the magazine's publisher had failed to notify the authorities of its change of address.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's election pledge to grant autonomy to the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar remains unfulfilled. BTV is

Shukrana Dibash today

UNB, Dhaka

Ruling Awami League will observe "Shukrana Dibash" today to express gratitude to Almighty Allah for the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu.

Awami League General Secretary and Local Government Minister Zillur Rahman called upon all to observe the day by offering special munajat in all mosques after Juma prayers and in other places of worship.

He expressed satisfaction and gratitude to Allah for the High Court's confirmation of the death sentence to 12 convicts in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

He said for long 21 years, the killers could not be tried due to infamous indemnity ordinance promulgated by military ruler Ziaur Rahman.

The killers announced with arrogance that none will be able to put them into trial, but after coming to power the Awami League government repealed the indemnity ordinance and paved the way for the trial of the killers, he said.

Zillur said through the confirmation of the death sentence of the killers the country moved one step forward to the establishment of rule of law. "It has been proved that none is above law."

regarded as a tool to dish out propaganda of governments. The same is said about the official news agency, BSS, though it has recently widened the area of coverage.

The opposition BNP has long been refusing BTV coverage of its programmes. Its activists obstructed BTV camera crew from recording party programmes on many occasions, alleging that the state-run media project the opposition negatively.

Despite various pressures, more than 500 publications are now in circulation in the country. Local journalists defend their rights vocally, and a number of organisations have been formed in recent years to promote press freedom.

International media rights organisations condemned all the attacks on journalists and sought adequate government steps to ensure freedom of press and security of the journalists. Nevertheless, the fact remains that actions were seldom taken.

Despite signing "The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" during the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York, the government is yet to move to have the covenant as well as Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in the parliament, both guaranteeing absolute freedom of expression.

Self-censorship by the journalists and interference by the owners often hinder free flow of information and freedom of press as such in the country.



PHOTO: STAR

Feni Sangbadik Forum organised an open discussion on "Attacks on journalism: Remedial measures" at the National Press Club yesterday to mark the World Press Freedom Day..

Khulna BNP leader Isa dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Syed Isa, a front-ranking leader of BNP and Khulna bureau chief of Dainik Dinkal, died of cancer at the Nargis Memorial Clinic here yesterday. He was 55.

He left behind his wife, three daughters, one son, eight-sisters, four brothers, father and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

City Mayor Tayebur Rahman is his brother-in-law.

A freedom fighter, Isa took part in all progressive movements. He played an active role in 1969 mass upsurge.

Syed Isa also worked in different national dailies including The Daily Star.

Dolly Sayantani acquitted

UNB, Dhaka

Dolly Sayantani, a popular singer, has been acquitted of the charge of killing a 10-year-old boy who was run over by her car in Dhaka in December.

Following a statement of the victim's mother and police investigation report, Metropolitan Magistrate Kazi Meraj Hossain acquitted Dolly yesterday.

Roky a student of class IV, was crushed to death under the wheels of Dolly's car at Badda on December 7. Dolly was driving the car at that time.

Following the accidents, a mob stopped the car and set it on fire. And Dolly was handed over to police.

On investigation, police submitted the final report on April 28. Before accepting the report, the court listened to the mother of the victim.

It was earlier reported that Dolly paid Tk one lakh in compensation to the mother of Roky following conciliation between the two parties.

Property worth Tk 20 lakh gutted in Chittagong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Around 25 business establishments including engineering workshops, motor garages, shops and a saw mills were gutted damaging property worth over Tk 20 lakh in a fire at Bahadderhut under Chandgaon thana in the city in the early hours yesterday. One fire-man was also injured in the fire.

Fire service and witnesses said, the fire broke out at Bahadderhut Arakan Sarak area adjacent to Coca-Cola factory at around 3.15 am. The fire spread fast and gutted eight motor and cabin garages, three motor parts shops, three engineering workshops, six shops, one saw mills and several other business establishments.

One fire service man identified as Bidhaa Kanti Sheel received burn injury while extinguishing the fire that continued for over two hours. However, he was released after first aid.

The fire reportedly originated from electric short-circuit and the losses in the fire was estimated at over Tk 20 lakh.

HC orders release

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Later, he was shown arrested in three other cases under the Public Safety Act, his lawyers said.

Another Division Bench will hear a petition for bail on Tuesday, said a press release issue by his counsel Tanvir Ahmed Al-Amin. Barrister Abdur Razzaq stood for Mujib, the release added.

Meanwhile, another Division Bench of the High Court comprising Justice Shah Mohammad Naim and Khademul Islam Choudhury yesterday turned down a petition seeking bail and stay of an arms case filed against BNP MP Shahidul Islam in Beramara, Kushiia. The BNP lawmaker was out of the country when police filed the case.

The Bench also directed police not to arrest him for three days upon his return from abroad, court sources said.

The court directed the MP to surrender before the lower court and seek bail there.

Barrister Maudud Ahmed stood for Shahidul Islam. The state was represented by deputy attorney general Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik.

WorldTel

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MOPT sources said WorldTel is in the process of obtaining a license and it has to fulfill certain conditions for that.

One source said, "WorldTel was supposed to submit a list of possible vendors from which it would procure equipment. But it has struck a deal with MTNL, which is not a vendor but an operator."

"Possibly, MTNL is not included in WorldTel's probable list."

The Indian government owns 65 per cent of shares of MTNL, listed with Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE).

WorldTel was scheduled to sign a contract with the MOPT in the second week of November last year for installation of the new telephones.

Storm lashes Chittagong

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Medium to heavy rainfalls were reported in different parts of the country including the capital during the past 36 hours ending at 6 p.m. yesterday by the Department of Meteorology, which put an end to the prolonged dry spell.

The Chittagong city experienced a storm that reached up to 65 km per hour in the early afternoon splashing the port city with showers totalling 22 mm.

The capital experienced 58 mm of rains, which flooded many city streets. Until 6 a.m. the showers totalled 48 mm.

During the period, Tangail recorded the highest amount of 98 mm rainfall. The rainfall was reported in almost every part of the country with the exception of Rangpur and Dinajpur. Bogra had had 71 mm rainfall and Rajshahi 26 mm.

The showers washed away the sultry weather and ended a long dry

spell that had gripped the country from earlier this year.

A massive stream of the southerly winds from the Bay of Bengal mating with the westerly ones had triggered the showers since Monday night, a senior meteorologist said yesterday.

The rains are likely today in most parts of the country with fair weather returning slowly afterwards. But rains will break again in the later part of the week, the meteorologist said.

In its long range forecast for May, the meteorological department said rainfall is likely to be almost normal during the month. In the second half of the month, flash floods are likely in the northeastern and southeastern regions.

At least one to two low pressures may brew in the Bay of Bengal, which may turn into a cyclone.

At least four to six nor'westers with thunderstorms in the central and northern regions and three to five elsewhere in the country are expected, the forecast said.

FBCCI for embargo

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He said Dhaka-Delhi annual trade roughly accounts for 3 billion dollars, of which 50 per cent is done through unofficial channel, meaning smuggling.

In reply to a query the FBCCI chief said recent Bangladesh-India border skirmishes would not affect trade and economic ties. He said consultations are on for duty-free access of Bangladeshi items to Indian market. Exports to India are increasing and presently worth 90 million dollars, which he hoped would go up to around 200 million dollars in next five years.

Asked about actual foreign investment, he said there is a big gap between figures of investment registered with BOI and actual capital invested. The FBCCI he said, requested the BOI to give the

actual investment figure on quarterly basis.

To a question, he said apart from major investment in gas sector, five leading foreign companies of the world are investing in cement sector, which is quite promising. He said gas companies might not feel encouraged until they get returns on their money by selling natural gas by way of downstream business-producing gas-based commodities.

In reply to another question, Haroon said Bangladesh might not benefit from mere duty-free access to EU market and Japan until the rules-of-origin provision, pertaining to fabrics, is relaxed.

OCAB president SM Zahurul Alam chaired the briefing and general secretary Parveen F Chowdhury gave vote of thanks.

Changes in EC

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Peters called on her at her Banani office in the city yesterday evening.

He said responding to the US envoy's query for holding a free and fair polls, she also emphasised the need for "cancellation of all political and contractual appointments, putting behind the bars the identified ruling party terrorists" and inviting neutral polls observers and release of all political detainees.

Rezaul said, during the call on the BNP chairperson also expressed her grave concern over the escalation of tension along the border following intrusion of Indian

Border Security Force into Bangladesh territory.

Khaleda told the US envoy that it is not understandable to her party why the government has failed to inform the nation of what exactly happened on the border, he said.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and MM Rezaul Karim assisted Khaleda Zia while Political Counselor of the US Embassy Dan Mozena accompanied the US envoy.

Earlier UNDP Resident Representative Jorgen Lissner also called on Khaleda and discussed issues relating to fair elections and overseas election monitors.

JCD activist shot dead by rivals in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, SYLHET

An activist of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was shot dead by his rival in the organisation in Sylhet town yesterday afternoon.

Police and local sources said Abdul Halim, 20, an activist of JCD was called out of his house at Ban Kolapara in Subid Bazar area of Sylhet town at about 4-15 pm. Halim belongs to Mizan group of the JCD and was attacked by 'Supply Group' led by Quamrul Hassan Shahin.

A group of young men led by one Toufique called Halim out of his house. They all went to the shop of one Golap Miah in a nearby area to buy cigarette. The assailants shot him when he was returning home. He was rushed to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Halim was involved in snatching, extortion and other crimes for long, it is alleged.

Charge sheet against 18

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Chowdhury, and Mohammad Abdul Aziz Pasha, former majors Bazul Huda and Ahmed Sharful Hossain, former captains Abdul Majed, Kishmat Hashem and Nazmul Hossain Ansar, Risaldar Moslehuddin alias Moslem Uddin, Dafadar Marfat Ali, LD Abul Hashem Mridha and former state minister Taher Uddin Thakur.

All but Ahmed Sharful Hossain, Kismat Hashem, Nazmul Hossain Ansar, Marfat Ali, Abul Hashem Mridha and Taher Thakur were sentenced to death in the Bangabandhu Murder Trial.

The charge-sheet named 58 persons as witnesses of the case.

According to the charge-sheet, 13 people including eight women were killed and more than 50 people injured in the shelling at Sher Shah Shuri Road and Shahjahan Road in Mohammadpur area on the fateful night of August 15, 1975.

The dead were identified as

Rezia Begum, Nasima Khatun, Habibur Rahman, Anowara Begum, Joyful Bibi, Sabera Begum, Anwara Begum, Abdullah, Mohammad Rafizal, Safia Khatun, Shahabuddin, Aminuddin and Kaseda Begum.

High-level

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issues, which mainly fall under three broad categories: exchange of enclaves, settlement of adverse possessions and demarcation of 6.5 kilometres at Muhiirchar.

Copy of verdict

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