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Foreign newsmen deported

Saleem, Pricilla still behind the bars

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday deported two journalists of the British Channel 4 television, Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino, following their undertaking that they would not broadcast any of the materials collected from the country.

They flew to Dubai from Zia International Airport at 8:50pm by an Emirates flight.

At a crowded press conference at the foreign ministry yesterday afternoon, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman announced the deportation of the two foreign journalists arrested on November 25 as "an extraordinary gesture".

Reaz said the two acknowledged that "they had improperly entered the country on false professional identities and apologised for their act of deception".

Briton Malik and Italian Sorrentino were handed over to the heads of missions of their respective countries. Earlier, the envoys had a hectic

negotiation with the Bangladesh authorities at the foreign ministry office.

Deportation of the foreign journalists came in the wake of growing protests especially from the international media watchdogs and reported pressure from the UK and Italy. But, Reaz denied any such pressure.

However, local journalist Saleem Samad and NGO activist Pricilla Raj who were arrested on charge of assisting the Channel 4 journalists were not released until yesterday.

Police arrested the two Channel 4 journalists on sedition charges while they were crossing Bangladesh border at Benapole in Jessore for India on November 25.

The two foreign journalists came here to film a current affairs programme for Channel 4 about the reported al-Qaeda presence in Bangladesh. On their arrest at the Benapole border, customs authorities seized films and other documents from them "intended to tarnish the image of Bangladesh".

"They (Malik and Sorrentino) stated that they had duly investigated allegations of al-Qaeda/Taliban activities in Bangladesh, but found no evi-

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Saleem, Pricilla likely to be freed soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government would soon release alleged associates of two foreign journalists, freelance journalist Saleem Samad and NGO activist Pricilla Raj.

The government yesterday deported the two foreign journalists, British Zaiba Naz Malik and Italian Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino who work for the British television Channel 4 and had entered the country concealing their identity.

Highly placed government sources said Saleem and Pricilla would be released following the court decision.

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Infringement of legal process in arrests and detentions

ZAYADUL AHSAN

The way the government has arrested and treated people of different political opinions in recent times has raised questions about its respect for the country's legal system.

Not only has the government violated laws one after another, it has even disobeyed court orders. Also, it has clearly abused Section

54 and 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

As the government controls the

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police and lower court, the aggrieved citizens in larger numbers are crowding the higher court to seek justice.

In recent times, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court served several show cause notices on the government questioning such a hostile behaviour.

Yesterday, the government took recourse to the Special Powers Act (SPA) to send directly to jail from a police station former general secretary of Dhaka Bar Association Momtazuddin Meheddi under a one-

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Belated bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

More than five hours after their release from the Dhaka Central Jail, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday granted bail to two journalists of the British Channel 4 television.

By the time Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shahidul Islam passed the order yesterday evening, Italian-born Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino and British national Zaiba Naz Malik had already been taken to Zia International Airport (ZIA) for deportation.

The two, accused in a sedition case, were granted bail on a bond of Tk 1 lakh each from two guarantors - public relations officer of their respective embassies and a lawyer.

The order came upon a bail petition moved on their behalf.

Earlier, the home ministry sent a letter to the CMM's Court, Dhaka about the release of Sorrentino and Malik, court sources said.



Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino of the British Channel 4 television network at Zia International Airport before deportation yesterday. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka set them free on bail in a sedition case.

PHOTO: STAR

Mymensingh blast toll now 18

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

One more victim of Mymensingh bomb explosions died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday, raising the toll to 18.

The victim -Juel, 25, -- a bakery worker, was shifted to DMCH on Tuesday from Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) as his condition deteriorated.

Fatally injured Juel was among many victims of a powerful bomb explosion at Aloka Cinema at Mymensingh on the day after the Eid. Eight people died on the spot.

Fruit vendor Uttam, 25, another victim of the explosion, is now under treatment at the Orthopaedic Hospital in the city for serious injuries in both legs.

Another 18 persons injured in the bomb explosions are now being treated at MMCH. Most of them are now out of danger and some of them

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Annan unhappy over handling of Iraq files

Iraq accuses US of highhanded behaviour

BBC ONLINE, AFP

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has described as "unfortunate" the Security Council's handling of the Iraqi weapons declaration, amid continuing discontent over Washington's role in the matter.

Annan, responding to questions from BBC World Service listeners, said the decision to allow the US to take the only complete copy of the document to edit it before it was released to non-permanent Council members "was fine, but the approach and style were wrong".

The chief UN weapons inspector, Hans Blix, has said an edited version of the 12,000-page dossier

could be ready by Monday, and a preliminary assessment available by Thursday.

Iraq earlier accused the US of "unprecedented blackmail" and warned that Washington could alter the contents of the document, which has already been distributed to the five permanent Council members.

Some of the 10 non-permanent members of the council have criticised the moves to restrict early access to the files, which Baghdad says prove that it has no weapons of mass destruction.

But Blix stressed that what was being taken out of the lengthy document was material that could be "risky" from the point of view of

weapons proliferation. Weapons inspectors on the ground in Iraq have stepped up their operations, visiting five sites on Tuesday - the most so far in a single day.

Iraq's condemnation of the US came shortly after Washington duplicated and handed over copies of the dossier to China, France, Russia and the UK.

"This American behaviour aims at manipulating UN documents to find cover for aggression against Iraq," the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

While describing the row over America's role as "unfortunate",

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DB summons Shaikh Siraj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday summoned Head of News of Channel i Shaikh Siraj about alleged connection of his office with the attempted smuggling of top criminal Abdur Rashid alias Kala Faruque out of the country as a member of a cultural team.

Siraj, better known for his Mati o Manush, a BTV programme on agriculture, was summoned at 9:00am at the DB office and released at 7:00pm.

Siraj was quizzed regarding different points about the cultural team's impending Sweden trip of which Kala Faruque was a part. Earlier singer Shuvra Dev was also nabbed for his alleged involvement in helping Faruque escape.

Details about the interrogation session could not be known. Siraj could not be reached for comments

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Commentary

A sensible move on foreign journalists

No ground to hold Saleem, Pricilla now

MAHFUZ ANAM

The government did yesterday what it should have done at the very outset - send Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino, the two foreign journalists who were in jail for the last 16 days, packing the moment it was discovered that they were here on false identity. That way we would have saved ourselves the bad press that we got and the repressed resentment among the international journalist community that may get reflected in the future.

However, better late than never; we have moved in the right direction for which we congratulate the government. As professional journalists we regret the fact our foreign colleagues resorted to lies and false pretense in

order to get their story but we regret equally that less painful and humiliating ways of handling this mishap could not have been thought of. It must be said in their favour that once inside Bangladesh they did not hide their identity and had introduced themselves as journalists from the UK-based Channel 4 and also explained their story line to all those they interviewed. Anyway the whole episode was an immensely regrettable affair and we are glad that it is over - partially.

We say partially because the cases of the local freelance journalist Saleem Samad and the translator Pricilla Raj still remain unresolved. The government's p r e s e n t

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Police club BCL procession in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least ten leaders and activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and a female ward commissioner of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) were injured in police clubbing in the city yesterday.

Police beat them in a procession of the BCL, the student chapter of the main opposition Awami League (AL), in front of the party headquarters on the Bangabandhu Avenue.

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The procession prior to a rally at about 4:00pm was organised to protest the bomb blasts in Mymensingh that killed at least 17 people and arrest of some AL leaders.

The injured include Baloram

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Awami League (AL) central leader Motia Chowdhury tries to wrest a party banner from police after law enforcers clubbed a Bangladesh Chhatra League procession taken out yesterday to protest the arrest of some AL leaders.

PHOTO: STAR