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Reuters office raided

Police seize documents; reporter sacked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police Friday night raided the Dhaka Bureau office of Reuters and seized documents related to its reports about the serial bomb blasts at four cinema halls in Mymensingh on December 7.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury has already served a legal notice on Reuters for Tk 10 crore in compensation, Information Minister Tariqul Islam told editors of print and electronic media yesterday. He also said the government would sue Reuters for defamation.

Meanwhile, Reuters stringer Enamul Haque Chowdhury, who is also a senior reporter of the official

BSS news agency, was interrogated yesterday, the second day of his three-day remand. Police claimed that Enam, arrested on Friday, had admitted wrongdoing with the story he filed as regards the comments by the home minister.

The BSS yesterday sacked Enam on charge of violating service rules, the official agency's Managing Director Amanullah Kabir informed BBC Radio last night.

In another development, Reuters South Asia Editor William James Spo Sato came to Dhaka yesterday. Sato started looking into developments that led the news agency to retract its Dhaka datelined reports

on December 7 and 8 on the Mymensingh bombings.

The Reuters withdrew its bomb explosion stories after the home minister denied having told Reuters what the news agency quoted him as saying. The agency earlier quoted the minister as saying that al-Qaeda or any other terrorist group might have links with the Mymensingh blasts.

"Sato has started talking with Reuters' Dhaka Bureau journalists. He is expected to meet the government officials before his possible action," said a source at the agency's Dhaka office.

A police statement about Enam's arrest on Friday said the Reuters

story "tarnished the country's image internationally and threatened its relations with powerful and friendly countries".

Tariqul also referred to the arrested local guides of two European journalists and said: "They have knowingly done it (assisting the foreign journalists) not to earn a few dollars."

The foreign journalists were deported late last week but the local aides are still in the Dhaka Central Jail.

"All these are being done to disparage the government," the information minister observed.

Army arrests Shamim Osman's brother

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army yesterday arrested AKM Selim Osman, elder brother of former Awami League lawmaker AKM Shamim Osman, from his garments factory at Fatullah in Narayanganj.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reported that an army team arrested Selim Osman after recovering a foreign-made pistol from his factory.

The team raided the factory -- Wisdom Attires -- at around 10:30 am. Selim, a former president of Narayanganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was not in the factory at the time.

The army personnel later asked

him over telephone to come to his office at the factory. As he arrived, they interrogated him.

Witnesses said joint forces then conducted a thorough search in the three-storied factory building. At one stage, a police constable recovered a 9 mm pistol from a bathroom at about 1:30 pm. Selim was then taken to Fatullah army camp.

When contacted last night,

Announcement

Due to newspaper holiday on the Victory Day on Monday (Dec 16), Star Lifestyle will come out on Wednesday instead of Tuesday.

Fatullah police said army took him to their camp following arrest. At around 6:00 pm army took him to the Fatullah Police Station for some time and took him back.

Police sources seeking anonymity said Selim became sick after arrest. A doctor at the Narayanganj 200-bed hospital said army brought Selim at the hospital at about 6:30 pm. As his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). The doctor also sought anonymity.

Selim's family members said he is a heart patient and he did not go to his factory office for the last three days.

Govt urged not to harass innocent journalists

UNB, Dhaka

Editors of national dailies, news agencies and the electronic media yesterday observed that an international news agency miserably failed to perform its professional duties in reporting Mymensingh bomb blasts.

However, they urged the government not to harass any innocent journalist in this connection.

The editors made the remarks during an opinion-exchange meeting with Information Minister Tariqul Islam at the information ministry, a government handout said.

They said the international wire service would have to bear the responsibility of its failure and



Different political and socio-cultural organisations queue up at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Mirpur in the city yesterday to pay homage to the worthy sons of the soil.

Martyred Intellectuals Day observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation observed the 32nd Martyred Intellectuals Day yesterday, paying glowing tributes to those illustrious sons of the soil who sacrificed their lives to free the motherland.

On this occasion, the nation renewed its pledge to materialise the martyrs' dream for a truly democratic and exploitation-free society.

Sensing their imminent defeat, the Pakistani occupation forces and their local collaborators -- Rajakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shamskidnapped leading Bengalee intellectuals and professionals on December 14, 1971 and killed them only two days before the nation's victory in its nine-month long War of Liberation.

The renowned academics, doctors, engineers, journalists, teachers and other eminent personalities were dragged blind folded out

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Akheri Munajat today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The three-day Biswa Ijtema at Tongi, around 20 kilometres north of the city, ends today with the Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers).

Moulana Zobair from India is likely to conduct the prayers starting at around 11:30am. Several millions devotees will seek divine blessing for continued peace and progress of the Muslim Ummah during the half-an-hour prayers.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina are likely to attend the munjat.

The president is likely to say his

prayers sitting at a separate dais in the Ijtema arena while the prime minister will say hers on the rooftop of a nearby Bata Shoe factory building.

Ministers, state ministers, high government officials and political leaders would accompany her during the munjat. A special pandal has been put up on Bata Shoe factory building for the prime minister and other dignitaries.

The leader of the opposition Sheikh is likely to offer her munjat at a building of Ashraf Textile Mills. Senior Awami League leaders and former ministers would join her.

The government has taken

extensive preparation to ensure smooth end of the largest congregation of the Muslims after the Hajj. Special train and bus services round the clock connecting Tongi with Dhaka and other major cities have been arranged.

The sprawling Ijtema arena on 162 acres of land on the eastern bank of river Turag has already turned into a sea of humanity. Thousands of devotees are still streaming into it.

Leading Islamic scholars from home and abroad delivered religious sermons throughout the day yesterday highlighting the teaching

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Bail petition for Saleem, Pricilla rejected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court, Dhaka yesterday again rejected the bail petition of freelance journalist Saleem Samad and NGO worker Monjia Pricilla Raj, accused in a sedition case.

This was the third time their bail petition was rejected though the principal accused in the case -- Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino and Zaiba Naz Malik of the British Channel 4 TV Network -- were released on bail and deported from the country three days ago.

Magistrate Khandaker Atiar

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Textbook cover change to cost Tk 5cr in losses

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

A move to change cover pages of new textbooks for secondary level students will raise the cost of production, causing a loss of about Tk five crore to the authorities, printing industry sources said.

Officials of the National

Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) said they have decided to change the cover pages, as there are some changes in the contents of the books.

However, some printers alleged, apart from a few, curriculum and content for the secondary level students remain almost unchanged.

Students and guardians fear that change of the cover pages would increase the prices of textbooks for the next academic year and also delay printing and distribution.

When contacted, a top official of the education ministry brushed aside the apprehension of price hike. "The government is cautious to ensure that book prices remain the same as in the previous year."

He mentioned that the government has already cut the profit margin of printers by one per cent and royalty by two per cent so that prices of the books do not rise. "For this, the government may incur a little loss but it would ensure that students do not face a price hike of books," he said.

The NCTB has recently awarded the job of printing 1.25 crore secondary level textbooks to 276 printing firms for the 2003 academic year.

Printers apprehended that 1.25 crore books would not be enough for the secondary level students. Last year, 2.5 crore books were printed.

NCTB officials however said more books would be printed, if necessary.