

Mahmudur held

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daily may not come out today.

However, talking to The Daily Star around 2:20am today, Amar Desh Press Manager Mohiuddin Jilani claimed the management was making alternative arrangements to print as many copies as possible for today.

In the first case, Mahmudur was charged with sedition by publishing Skype conversations between Justice Md Nizamul Huq, then chairman of International Crimes Tribunal-1, and Ahmed Ziauddin, an expatriate Bangladesh legal expert.

Sahidur Rahman, prosecutor of the war crimes tribunal, filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station on December 13 last year.

Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir said Mahmudur was arrested under Bangladesh Penal Code and in a case lodged under Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006.

According to the case statement, Mahmudur Rahman, by publishing conversations after hacking Skype, created a negative impression about the tribunal at home and abroad and obstructed its proceedings and exercise of legal authority.

Amar Desh published the conversations on December 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 last year. Amid controversy, Justice Nizamul Huq resigned on December 11.

Also yesterday, Mahmudur was shown arrested in two other cases filed last month with the same police station, even though his name was not included in the first information reports.

One of the cases was filed on March 17 in connection with hartal and pre-hartal violence and another on March 26 for assaulting police and obstructing their work.

A former energy adviser of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government, he was placed on a seven-day remand in connection with the Skype case and a three-day remand each in the other two cases.

The acting editor was arrested around 9:00am from Amar Desh office. He had been staying there to evade arrest since he was sued along with the daily's Publisher Hasmat Ali in the Skype case.

Since dawn, plainclothes detectives had been moving about the BSEC Bhaban, which houses Amar Desh office on its 10th floor, witnesses say.

Saiful Islam, security guard of the building, said a huge contingent of DB and Tejgaon police personnel went to the BSEC Bhaban in seven vehicles around 8:45am and shut down nearby shops.

The cops then stormed the newspaper office and asked Mahmudur to get ready to go with them, said some of the police members who took part in the drive.

Shouting and thumping the table, Mahmudur, who was in lungi at that time, told the police that they always showed up at inappropriate time, they added.

Mahmudur was taken to the DB headquarters on Minto Road, where he was kept till 2:25pm, and then moved to the CMM's Court. During the stay at DB headquarters, his mother, wife and staff of Amar Desh wanted to meet him but were refused.

The staff of the newspaper protested the arrest and alleged that police had taken away hard discs from several computers and video footage from closed circuit cameras.

Later, around 8:30pm, detectives teamed up with Tejgaon police began a two-hour drive. At the end of the raid, they locked the printing press of the daily and seized a computer of the press manager and some documents.

Mohiuddin Jilani, the press manager, said, "Police asked us to leave, saying from now on nobody will be allowed in the press without a court order. They would stand guard at the gate."

This correspondent saw

five to six policemen guarding the press around 11:00pm.

The drive was launched following a Dhaka court's directive, said Biplab Sarkar, deputy commissioner of police (Tejgaon division). He added that the court ordered seizure of all the materials related to the Skype case.

Meanwhile, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday strongly denounced the arrest of Mahmudur Rahman and demanded his immediate release.

Factions of Dhaka Union of Journalists and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists held a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club and issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the government to release Mahmudur.

Besides, different organisations, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh, Hefajat-e-Islam, Islami Chhatra Khalefat Andolon, Asian Human Rights Commission, Doctors' Association of Bangladesh and Nagorik Odhikar Rokkha Committee, condemned the arrest.

On June 2, 2010, Mahmudur Rahman was detained in a case filed for resisting arrest, assaulting law enforcers and preventing them from performing their duties. Later, 49 cases were filed against him.

The Supreme Court on August 19 the same year sentenced him to six months' imprisonment and fined him Tk 1 lakh for contempt of court. He was released on March 17, 2011.

AT COURT
Yesterday, Mahmudur was produced before the court around 3:00pm and the hearing on the remand prayer was held in his presence. Without appointing any lawyer, he opposed the prayer. He, however, refrained from seeking bail.

During the hearing, he claimed he had not committed any offence by publishing the Skype conversations because they were published in The Economist before.

The charges in the case brought against him were false, fabricated and concocted, he said, adding, "I know well that if I appoint any lawyer, he or she will submit prayers for my bail and cancellation of the remand prayer foolishly."

"The court will act on whatever decision comes from the government," Mahmudur alleged. He told the court that the charges brought against him in two other cases were also false as he had been confined at his newspaper office since December 13.

"So how could I commit such offences of vandalising vehicles and assaulting police?" he questioned.

At one stage of the hearing, the prosecution and pro-BNP lawyers were locked in heated debate when Mahmudur hurled abusive words at the public prosecutors. The magistrate of the court intervened to calm the situation.

CONDEMNATION
Termining Mahmudur an outspoken person against the government's anti-people policy, BNP Chairperson said in a press release, "The government's Bakslai character has been revealed through Mahmudur's arrest."

Criticising the government, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "Arrest of acting editor of the daily Amar Desh, known as a BNP mouthpiece, is considered to bring serious disaster for the country's democracy."

Describing Mahmudur as "heartbeat of Islam-loving people," Hefajat-e-Islam of Dhaka city unit, in a statement, lambasted the government for arresting him. "We think he [Mahmudur] was arrested in a planned way to make anti-Islamists and atheists happy."

The Chittagong-based Islamist group also issued a threat that "the whole country will be on fire if Mahmudur is not released."

Mentioning that Mahmudur has won the hearts of millions of devout Muslims by exposing atheists through his daily, the

Hefajat leaders said the government was committing excesses only to meet the demands of a few atheists.

Azizul Haque Islamabadi, organising secretary of Hefajat, told The Daily Star that the organisation would bring out a protest procession after Juma prayers today and hold a protest rally at Anderkilla intersection afterwards.

This demonstration will also be observed across the country after juma prayers, he said, also adding that the declaration of further movement would be announced today.

A faction of Islami Oikya Jote leaders in a meeting yesterday threatened that "the whole country will be burnt if Mahmudur is not released immediately."

Nabo Barsho

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gesture, Suratuzzaman, the opposition leader's assistant personal secretary, handed over a greeting card to SK Aktar Hossain at the PM's Office around 1:40pm, said Syrul Kabir Khan, BNP chairperson's press wing member.

The nation will celebrate Pahela Baishakh on Sunday amid traditional fanfare and festivity.

Hartal

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its allies in the past two months are to blame.

On regular working days, Masud's sales amount to Tk 1,000-1,100 on average, but during shutdowns his takings drop sharply. His combined sales on two hartal days -- Monday and Tuesday -- were of Tk 650.

Masud's is not an isolated story, but the narrative of the plight of some 23.97 lakh hawkers and street vendors, according to an estimate of Bangladesh Chhinnomul Hawkers Samity.

According to Kamal Siddiki, president of the association, shutdowns reduce hawkers' takings by around 35 percent.

The violent nature of the hartals this time round scares people away. They do not venture out unless necessary, let alone stop by to purchase items off roadside vendors.

In a bid to lure in customers on hartal days, Mohammad Rubel, a menswear seller at Motijheel, resorted to selling garments at lower prices, sacrificing his margins.

"We have some fixed costs even if we do not open the store. If we can make some sales, we can at least make up part of that cost," said Sagor Hossain, another menswear hawker at Motijheel.

He cited the obligation to pay tolls regularly, along with charges for using a warehouse and a light bulb.

Over at Gulistan that usually buzzes with hawkers and pedestrians, street vendors were found sitting idle in the afternoon.

"Because of the consistent hartals, my sales have been deplorably bad," said Mohammad Gaus Farazi, a hawker whose income is tied to the number of T-shirts he sells.

Depending on prices, he gets Tk 5-10 as commission per piece from the owner.

Farazi takes home about Tk 400-500 on sales of T-shirts worth Tk 5,000-6,000 on normal days.

His sales receipts plummeted to Tk 1,500-2,000 on hartal days, earning him Tk 150-180 at the end of the day. Of the amount, he has to spend Tk 110 daily for bus fare and lunch.

The scene is almost identical for street vendors in front of Chandni Chawk Market.

In the absence of customers in their makeshift shops, hawkers were seen talking to each other to kill time.

"Although we open our shops during hartals, we hardly have any sales," said Mohammed Shohag, a womenswear seller.

The roadside vendor sells garments of around Tk 10,000 daily, but on hartal days it comes down to Tk 2,000-3,000, he said.

He gets a flat Tk 300 per day as remuneration from his owner.

"But I am worried if he [the owner] will be able to pay my salary this month."



Workers vacate the printing press of daily Amar Desh at the capital's Tejgaon during a raid last night. Right, detectives seize some documents and computer parts from the press.



PHOTO: STAR

Khaleda tells

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choice than to call hartals to press home their demands.

The opposition leader advised the businesspersons that they should rather put pressure on the government for restoring the caretaker government system to hold the next polls under it.

The BNP chief made the comment when a group of 30 businesspersons -- most of them known to have leaning towards BNP -- called on her at her Gulshan office last night.

Abdul Awal Mintoo, former FBCCI president and adviser to the BNP chairperson, led the group that included eight directors of the FBCCI.

During the two-hour meeting, Khaleda assured the delegation that her party would not call hartals if the government agreed to hold talks with the opposition on the caretaker government issue, said SM Shafiuzzaman, former president of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industry.

"We informed her that we could not export medicines due to political programmes. As a result, we cannot pay our staff. The economy is passing through very bad days," Shafiuzzaman, who is a former FBCCI director, told The Daily Star.

Twenty-five businessmen who spoke at the meeting expressed almost the same, saying businesses, especially the garment sector, were passing their worst time, meetings sources said.

In response, Khaleda said: "The government is oppressing the opposition greatly. Almost all of our senior leaders have been arrested. The government might even arrest me. Police are directly shooting our men. How can we remain silent after all these?"

According to the former prime minister, the opposition is at a point of no return.

"We've started a one-point movement to oust the government. We don't have any choice other than calling hartals and other tougher programmes. You should tell the prime minister how important an independent caretaker government is for the country and the economy," Khaleda was quoted to have told the delegation.

Ruthless

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He was sitting on his mother's lap on a bus when it came under attack yesterday. The windscreens of the bus shattered into pieces, some of which hit him in the head.

Splinters of glass pierced through his skull and touched the brain, said DMCH sources.

Sohan's mother Shahnaz Begum said she boarded the bus around 9:00am, during the Shibir-called country-wide hartal, to visit her ailing mother at Rajapur in the same upazila.

She sat on a front seat close to the windscreens.

A group of picketing youths ran towards the bus and pelted it with brick chips. Shards of glass came flying into the bus.

"What was his crime to receive such punishment?" Sohan's father Salim Sheikh asked this correspondent.

Never did he imagine that a bus plying in a rural area would be attacked, said the father.

A Jamaat activist has been detained on suspicion of involvement in the attack on the bus, said Officer-in-Charge Ruhul Amin of Boalmari Police Station.

Four killed in hartal

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Biplob, but the other could not yet be named, Superintendent of Police in Chittagong AKM Hafiz Akhter told The Daily Star around 1:00am today.

Quoting local AL leaders, the SP said that two of the dead were ruling party activists.

The clashes broke out around 1:30pm when an anti-hartal procession by AL activists in Kazirhat area in Fatikchhari upazila came under attack. The attack followed an announcement over loudspeakers from Kazirhat Bazar Jame Mosque that a procession was coming to attack the mosque, said Shubash Barua, assistant sub-inspector of Bhujpur Police Station.

Police said more than 500 AL leaders and workers brought out a vehicle procession from Fatikchhari around 11:30am.

As the processionists were returning after parading through Bhujpur, they came under attack in Kazirhat Bazar area. Locals of Kazirhat, students of Kazirhat madrasa and activists of Jamaat and Hefajat, came out in their hundreds following the announcement from the mosque and attacked the procession with sharp weapons and sticks.

The fighting continued for nearly four hours, leaving at least 100 people including 15 policemen and five firefighters wounded.

Of the three killed, two died on the spot and the other at a local hospital.

Police said they could not take the injured to hospitals soon enough as the attackers blocked the road for around two hours.

Police fired several rounds to disperse the AL and Hefajat men but to little avail. Later, two platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh personnel were deployed to calm the situation.

The local administration

imposed section 144 (a ban on movement of more than four people in a group) in Bhujpur area under Fatikchhari upazila.

Police have arrested Bhujpur union chairman and nayeb-e-ameer of Bhujpur union Jamaat Shaful Alam Nuri.

In Khulna, the clash began when police tried to disperse Jamaat-Shibir men trying to block a road at Dhamalia by burning tyres and logs around 8:30am, said Abdul Kader Beg, additional superintendent of police in Khulna.

Attacked by Jamaat-Shibir activists, police fired 93 rounds. Shibir cadres blasted around 30 cocktails during the hour-long clash.

Besides the death of Jamaat activist Mansur Gazi, at least 20 people including six policemen were injured.

The law enforcers picked up 13 Shibir men from different areas.

Elsewhere in the country, the hartal was marked by sporadic clashes, leaving at least 102 people including 12 law enforcers wounded.

Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir enforced the shutdown protesting "torture of its detained President Delwar Hossain now in police custody".

Yesterday was the last day of four consecutive days of shutdown that began with a one-day hartal by Hefajat-e-Islami followed by a 36-hour hartal by the BNP-led 18-party alliance and Shibir's hartal. The spate of shutdowns seriously affected businesses, academic activities and plagued normal life.

With their back against the wall, many people came out of their homes in their personal vehicles, braving the hartal. Besides, a large number of buses and CNG-auto-rickshaws were seen plying the city roads during the hartal.

UNB adds: Jamaat-Shibir

has called an eight-hour hartal for tomorrow (Saturday) in Khulna district protesting the killing of Mansur.

The deceased, son of Khan Jahan Ali Gazi of Chechuri village in the upazila, was a human hauler driver, reports our Khulna correspondent.

In the port city, at least seven people were injured in a gunfight between Shibir activists and police when the law enforcers went to raid a building in Mohammapur area, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Panchlaish Police Station.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports: Md Shahidul Islam, an ASI of Khansama Police Station, suffered head injuries as Jamaat and Shibir threw brick chips on the aw enforcers who resisted the activists from picketing at Pakerhaat village in Khansama upazila around 10:00am.

Police arrested 20 Jamaat-Shibir men from the spot.

At least 10 passengers of two inter-city trains were injured as the pro-hartal activists hurled brick chips at the running trains at Puranpoil rail gate in Joypurhat Sadar upazila.

At least 14 people, including four policemen were injured in a clash between Shibir activists and police near Jameyatul Falahia Madrasa in Feni town.

The clash ensued when pro-hartal activists hurled several cocktails and brick chips targeting the policemen, leaving four constables injured, said Paritosh Ghosh, superintendent of police in Feni.

Shibir men blockaded Dhaka-Rangpur highway putting logs at Mahasthan and Mokamtala points around 6:00am, said Nazir Ahmed Khan, an assistant superintendent of police in Bogra.

In Sylhet, Shibir activists vandalised a police jeep at the city's Lamabazar area.

Black flags

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Chhatra Shibir.

The procession started at Projonmo Chattar and marched through Bangla Motors, Moghbazar, Eskaton and Paribagh before returning to Shahbagh.

The Shabbagh youths have been calling for resistance to Jamaat-Shibir-enforced hartals since they began the Gonojagoron movement on February 5 for capital punishment to 1971 war criminals. A ban on Jamaat-Shibir is also among their demands.

Talking to The Daily Star after the procession, Imran H Sarker, a key organiser of the movement, expressed satisfaction over the arrest of Amar Desh acting editor Mahmudur Rahman.

"The rule of law has been established. However, if he had been arrested much earlier, so much of violence, terrorism and communalism that we have seen could have been averted," said Imran.

Asked if the arrest was a victory for the Mancha, he said, "It's not a question of victory. Whoever commits crime is punished naturally."

The Shabbagh protesters had been demanding Mahmudur's arrest since February 22 for "instigating violence and communalism across the country and smearing the Gonojagoron Mancha activists and bloggers".

Imran also expressed grief over the death of anti-colonial revolutionary Binod Bihari Chowdhury.

Transparency

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it is crucial that even the slightest chances of corruption or waste of taxpayers' money should be dealt with utmost transparency and accountability."

The project hit a snag after the lead financier World Bank claimed that it found a corruption conspiracy in the project to award the construction supervisor's job to Canadian company SNC Lavalin.

The government on January 31 withdrew its request to the World Bank for the Padma bridge loan.

On Tuesday, Finance Minister AMA Muhiht discussed the new implementation plan at a pre-budget meeting with the Economic Reporters Forum.

He said the government would float tender by the first half of June to select bidders for the Padma bridge construction work and it would be completed by June 2016 as per the new implementation schedule.

He said the government would unveil detailed plans through a statement by April 13 (tomorrow).

A process, similar to the old implementation system where the donors had scope of evaluating the bidding process, would be employed to ensure transparency, the minister added.

A move was on to form a group to get a second opinion about the bidding process, he noted.

'Time Machine'

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state-run Centre for Strategic Interventions, The Telegraph reported.

According to a Fars news agency report, Razeghi, 27, claims the machine uses algorithms to produce a print-out of the details of any individual's life between five and eight years into their future.

Razeghi, quoted in the Telegraph, said: "My invention easily fits into the size of a personal computer case and can predict details of the next 5-8 years of the life of its users. It will not take you into the future, it will bring the future to you."

Razeghi is the managing director of Iran's Centre for Strategic Intervention and reportedly has another 179 inventions registered in his name.

He claims the invention could help the government predict military conflict and forecast fluctuations in the value of foreign currencies and oil prices.

According to Razeghi his latest project has been criticised by his friends and family for "trying to play God".

Iranian authorities are keen to showcase the technological prowess of the country but have been criticised in recent months for allegedly faking pictures of a new jet fighter flying over mountains.