

ATTACKS ON FREETHINKERS Noted citizens question cops' sincerity in probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twelve eminent citizens yesterday questioned the efficiency and sincerity of the law enforcement agencies in bringing the killers of freethinkers to book.

A statement issued by Bangladesh Rukhe Daroo, a platform of progressive and pro-liberation forces, said if the planners and killers of writer-blogger Avijit Roy and others were identified and brought to justice, these inhuman activities could largely be averted.

"Four of the five people killed following the murder of writer and freethinker Humayun Azad have died this year," read the statement.

"It proves that religious bigots are getting opportunities to get well organised and their aim is to make Bangladesh a Taliban state."

The citizens expressed grave concern and dismay at the killing of Faisal Arefin Dipan, Avijit's publisher, and attacks on another publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul along with two others.

They also observed that the atrocities and the killings of two foreign citizens took place at a time when the final verdicts on two war criminals were at the final stages.

The statement also slammed Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Al Jazeera TV "for not only pressing for release of these notorious war criminals but also for demanding trial of Bangladesh's freedom fighters".

Crores of dollars are being spent on the appointment of foreign lobbyists to foil the trial of war criminals, the citizens alleged in the statement.

"We firmly believe that people of different religions in Bangladesh are totally against such brutality," it said.

Prof Anisuzzaman, Avijit's father Ajoy Roy, Sultana Kamal, Prof MM Akash and Syed Shamsul Haq were among the signatories.

"This evil force's links to the international militant networks are helping it reach its goals," added the statement.

"United efforts of all citizens -- regardless of political affiliations -- against religious bigots are needed today."



Protesting the murder of Faisal Arefin Dipan of Jagriti Prokashani, owners kept all shops at Aziz Cooperative Supermarket in the capital closed as part of a two-day programme that began yesterday. Inset, a protest banner.

PHOTO: STAR

Shocked but not scared

Publishers vow to continue carrying candle of freethinking

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Publishers, left in a state of insecurity following Saturday's attacks on two of their colleagues, have nonetheless said they will not shun away from promoting freethinking.

They have said it is not possible to stop them from publishing books by striking terror in this way. But at the same time they have expressed fear that it may cast a dark cloud on the Ekushey Book Fair.

"They [the assailants] think they can stop some writers by killing one publisher. It is their tactic. But it's not possible to stop freethinking through killing," said Farid Ahmed, publisher of Shomoy Prokashani.

Farid, who already received a death threat, expressed his frustration at the government's laxity over taking measures to bring the attackers to book.

"We cannot fight alone if the government does not come forward. Publishing is not just my three-decade-long profession, it's my passion. My soul will die if I quit this job," he said.

Farid filed a general diary with Dhanmondi Police Station in connection with the threat around 3:00pm yesterday, seeking police protection.

He received a message on his mobile phone around 9:45am from 01721425008. The message reads: "You have published many books written by atheists, you have sinned. Be prepared for death! - Al-Ahrar, UK." (Nastikder onek boi chhepecho tumi, tomar onek paap. Mrityur jonyo prostut how! - Al-Ahrar, UK).

Investigators said the threat was issued from Sylhet.

Dhanmondi Police said they were providing Farid with security.

The threat came a day after suspected machete-wielding militants hacked to death Faisal Arefin Dipan, owner of Jagriti Prokashani, at Shahbagh and critically injured Ahmedur Rashid Tutul of Shuddhoswar Prokashani and two bloggers in Lalmatia. Both Dipan and Tutul were publishers of slain secular writer-blogger Avijit Roy.

Protesting the attacks, publishers, writers, businessmen, book sellers and employees of Aziz Cooperative Super Market yesterday wore black ribbons.

They will continue their protest today by refraining from selling books across the country from morning till afternoon.

Veteran publisher Mohiuddin Ahmed, proprietor of University Press Limited (UPL), said publishers "are being targeted as they publish the free thoughts of people."

However, it is not something new and has been going on for a while, he said.

Mahrulk Mohiuddin, director of UPL, said, "I don't feel insecure as a publisher but I do feel insecure as a citizen."

Robin Ahsan, publisher of Srabon Prokashani and a friend of Avijit and Tutul, said receiving death threat was nothing new to publishers.

He filed GDs a couple of times, including one with Shahbagh Police in February this year after the murder of Avijit.

"What will happen if I file a GD? Will police protect me?" asked Robin.

Many publishers are thinking of quitting the profession, which will affect the book industry, especially the Ekushey Book Fair, he said.

Ahsan Habib, publisher and editor of satire magazine Unmad, said publishers needed to be united to tackle the crisis as the attackers were small in number.

Dipak Roy, chief executive of Sanghati Publication, said the government must ensure people's right to

freedom of expression as it is a constitutional right.

"We are aggrieved as such incidents have been going on for quite sometimes. But we have yet to see any effective measures from the government," he said.

Mejbah Uddin Ahmed, publisher of Ankur Prokashani, said a number of his friends and colleagues had suggested he should not work late into the night.

Several publishers, when approached over the phone, sounded panicked and refrained from making any comment or being quoted on the issue.

"I never felt such pangs of insecurity in my life," said a top official of a leading publishing house. "Do you actually think I should talk on the issue?" he asked, requesting not to reveal his identity.

Another publisher, wishing anonymity, said, "Please forgive me. I don't want to make any comment on this."

Meanwhile, today Bangladesh Publishers and Book Sellers Association will submit a memorandum to Dhaka District Administration, and Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh will form a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club at 11:00am.

FROM PAGE 1

POLITICIANS SAY

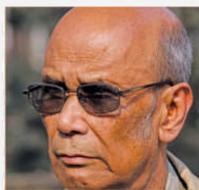


"A country opposed our Liberation War. That country has created militancy in different countries of the world ... Now the question is whether that country is playing any

"It's a clear militant attack. Such series killings just before the execution of two top war criminals indicate that those murders were not possible without the patronisation by

FROM PAGE 1

WRITERS SAY



"I believe extremist forces have done this. If the government fails to contain these elements, security of peo-

"I am outraged and angry ... I request the government to do something about it immediately and ensure secu-

"I wonder how long the government will keep silent! How long will we, the peace-loving people, have to put up with these brutalities? We

Predictable day follows

FROM PAGE 1

Soon after finding his son dead on Saturday, Prof Abul Quasem said he doesn't want a trial. Rather, he wanted "goodwill to prevail".

Talking to reporters before the janaza, he expressed doubt whether the political parties have the willingness to bring changes.

"Does the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party or the Left want this? People have to demand a change. When we wanted Bangladesh, we achieved it. The British rule was over when we wanted an end to it."

Talking about his son, Prof Quasem said, "He was an honest man and ran the publishing house, barely making a living. I don't know of any enmity he had with anybody."

The bereaved father was evidently tired of answering questions from journalists.

Dipan's son Ridat, who came to the janaza after taking JSC exam that began yesterday, addressing all said, "Please pray for my father. He will find his place in heaven."

Dipan was laid to rest at Azimpur Graveyard around 3:00pm.

Also on Saturday, another publisher, Shuddhoswar's Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, was critically injured by machete-wielding assailants at his Lalmatia office. The attack left his two fellows -- Ranadipam Basu and Tareque Rahim. Tareque was even shot in the chest.

Both Jagriti and Shuddhoswar published books written by Avijit Roy and both Dipan and Tutul had received threats on several occasions after Avijit's killing, said their friends and colleagues.

A day after the attacks on Dipan and Tutul, Somoy Prakashan publisher Farid Ahmed received death threat through SMS.

"You have published many books of atheists, you have sinned. Be prepared for death!" read the message received around 9:48am.

Investigators said the threat was issued from Sylhet.

Farid lodged a general diary around 3:00pm yesterday with Dhanmondi Police Station, said Officer-in-Charge Nur-e-Azam.

'IN THE DARK'

No case was filed in connection with Saturday's incidents while police say they could not recover anything related to the murder or make any arrest.

Zafar Ali Biswas, inspector (investigation) of Shahbagh Police Station, said they are "still in the dark".

Law enforcement and intelligent agencies yesterday collected footage of CCTV cameras installed at the entry points of Aziz Super Market.

A police official told The Daily Star that they are yet to get any clue about Dipan's killers from the image -- shot

from 12:00 to 6:00pm Saturday. DMP Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam said, "This is not a typical crime but a pre-planned targeted killing. So it is difficult to capture the killers," said Monirul.

Asked if such targeted attacks can be prevented, he said, "We need a special counterterrorism unit. As we don't have any such unit, we are trying our best with our available resources."

He added, "We are conducting threat analysis to prevent such attacks."

Around 9:30 on Saturday, a group identifying itself as "Ansar Al Islam (AQIS) Bangladesh," claimed responsibility for the twin incidents through an email sent to different media outlets.

"These secular and atheist publishers waged war against religion of Islam in every possible ways," it said.

In August, a group using the same name claimed responsibility for the murder of Niloy Chowdhury Neel, one of the four secularist bloggers hacked to death by suspected militants.

Of the other three, Avijit was murdered in February, Oyasiqur Rahman in March and Ananta Bijoy Das in May.

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday urged the countrymen to provide investigators with information, if they find any, about the killers of bloggers and publisher Dipan.

AUTOPSY

Kazi Mohammed Abu Shama, acting head of forensic department at DMC, who conducted autopsy of Dipan, yesterday said there were multiple hacking injuries on the back of the neck and one injury was 11 inch long and four inch deep.

It seemed that the attackers tried to cut off the head. Two stabs in the head caused internal haemorrhage in the brain and He died within a minute or two after he was hit in the head.

Probably the attackers were three to five in number. There was no sign of resistance by Dipan or the killers binding him with rope.

MEDICAL BOARD FOR THREE

The condition of Tutul, Ranadipam and Tareque improved slightly, said Dr Khawaja Abdul Gafur, assistant director (administration) of DMCH yesterday afternoon.

He, however, said Tutul and Tareque are not yet out of danger.

A nine-member medical board is treating the three, he added.

Tutul and Ranadipam were shifted to cabins early morning while Tareque was taken to a cabin in the afternoon.

Earlier, Tareque underwent an operation but the bullet stuck in his body is yet to be removed. Doctors are waiting for his condition to improve further to conduct another surgery.

Family members have called for adequate security for the injured.

Denying just won't do

FROM PAGE 1

saying that he just wanted good sense to prevail. "Those who are doing politics in the name of secularism and those who are doing politics over state religion, both are destroying the nation. Let there be good sense among them," he said.

And earlier yesterday, slain blogger Avijit Roy's wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya also echoed the same sentiment that she also did not seek justice for the murders of the bloggers and publishers.

They have said this out of frustration over the failure of the government in arresting and uprooting the network of the militant group and trivialising the militant attacks.

The minister's claim that these were isolated incidents is shadowed by the fact that earlier this year militants killed four freethinking bloggers. Between September and October, the militants also killed three "pirs". During the period, an Italian and a Japanese citizen were killed in the country.

For the murders of the bloggers and free thinkers, a group called Ansar Al Islam -- identifying itself as al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent, Bangladesh Chapter, and Ansarullah Bangla Team claimed responsibilities. After yester-

day's killing of Faisal of Jagriti Prokashani in his Shahbagh office and serious attack on Ahmedur Rashid Tutul of Shuddhoswar publication in his office in Lalmatia along with two bloggers Ranadipam Basu and Tareque Rahim, Ansar Al Islam sent message to the media.

"These secular and atheist publishers waged war against religion of Islam in every possible ways," it said, threatening to annihilate anyone who would dare stand against Islam.

Our home minister has assured us that the law enforcers were "thoroughly" investigating the latest murder and attack.

We have seen what this thorough investigation can do.

The police last week arrested a few people in the city in "connection" with the murder of the Italian citizen and said that these "criminals" acted on instructions of a "boro bhai" -- who is supposed to be some BNP leader.

These arrests or the police findings failed to achieve widespread credibility. After all, just when they were talking about this boro bhai, militants attacked a Shia community gathering for the first time in the country and killed one on the spot (another died after a few days).

Till now, with all its efficiency the

government could put behind bars just two militants in connection with the murder of one blogger, Oyasiqur Rahman. These two militants were captured by the public while they were fleeing. The police deserve no credit.

Instead of serious investigation, the police and ruling party men earlier this year had given a formula to prevent further militant attacks: do not to cross the limit when you are blogging.

Back in 2004, when the dreaded Bangla bhai emerged in the media, the-then prime minister Khaleda Zia had denied his existence. And yet in the following year, the Bangla bhai's group had launched countrywide bomb attacks. It proves that the government's denial of the militants' presence only provides an opportunity for them to become bigger and worst.

It's time the government should admit to itself that whatever measures it had taken or not taken to uproot militancy, are not working or working in a very limited way. The government cannot gain anything from false assurance and denial.

The militants are rising and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself had long been a target of the militants. After all, remedy begins from admitting that there is a problem.