

Going after editors is their old practice

BNP leader Hafiz reacts to PM's speech

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reacting to the prime minister's Monday's speech blasting editors of two top newspapers, BNP leader Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed yesterday said going after editors is an old habit of the Awami League.

"Going after editors is their old practice, a Baksali [era of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League] habit. They are now planning to shut down newspapers like they did earlier," the BNP vice-chairman said at a discussion on International Mother Language Day.

Swadhinata Forum organised the discussion titled "Glorious Ekushey's Ideology in Today's Perspective" at the Jatiya Press Club.

After the Awami League government introduced Bakshal government in 1975, Newspaper Ordinance was promulgated under which the declarations of all but four newspapers -- Dainik Bangla, Bangladesh Observer, Ittefaq and Bangladesh Times -- were annulled. "During the 2007-08 caretaker government regime, almost all the media outlets ran stories on Sheikh Hasina and other leaders. But only one freedom fighter editor has admitted his mistake. No one else did so. Now he is being vilified unjustly," Hafizuddin added.

Mentioning names of several Awami League leaders, the BNP leader pointed out that many AL leaders made far more defamatory comments in mass media during 2007-08.

"The prime minister didn't say anything about these individuals who made such remarks on her and her party when she lambasted The Daily Star editor yesterday," he said. Until yesterday, 79 lawsuits, including 17 sedition pleas and 62 defamation suits, were filed in 53 districts against The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam.

Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed said there is no freedom of expression in the country. Rizvi said an editor has to go to jail if he talks about freedom of the media.

"It seems that the Awami League is ruling the country imposing undeclared curfew," Rizvi told a briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

He said cases are being filed on charges of subversive activities if anyone talks about democracy, and police fire shots if any opposition party brings out processions or holds rallies.

Jhalakathi court

FROM PAGE 1

Information officer submitted an investigation report to Judge Md Jayed Ahmed complying with an earlier order, our Jhalakathi correspondent reports.

So far, 79 lawsuits -- 17 sedition and 62 defamation suits -- have been filed in 53 districts against Mahfuz Anam.

The barrage of cases began days after the Star editor at a talk show on February 3 made an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) cell during the 2007-08 caretaker government's tenure, without being able to verify those independently.

During the period, almost all the media outlets, both print and electronic, ran similar stories.

At the time, this newspaper published 11 such reports -- seven on alleged corruption of Khaleda Zia, her two sons -- Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko -- and other BNP leaders.

Three reports involved alleged graft of Sheikh Hasina and the other one of the then chief conservator of forests, Osman Gani.

The reports were based on the statements of some top Awami League and BNP leaders and businessmen, who were interrogated by member of the TFI cell.

Scores of cases were filed against top politicians, including Hasina and Khaleda, mostly based on those statements.

Khaleda, the BNP chief, and other BNP leaders still face many of those cases, but the charges against Hasina and most other AL leaders were either quashed or withdrawn after the AL took office in 2009.

Currently, the cases being filed against the Star editor allege that the reports run by this newspaper led to the arrest of Hasina, thus defaming her.



Erratic rickshaws on TV Road in the city's Rampura on Monday. The traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police has made a lane for the rickshaws, but they ignore it at will.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Nasim calls for commission to find out 1/11 conspirators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim yesterday called for forming an investigation commission to find out the conspirators behind the 1/11 political changeover in 2007.

"The commission should be constituted to probe some people's roles during the 1/11 period. It is necessary that they are unmasked by the commission," he said.

"Then, such incidents [conspiracies] would not repeat."

Nasim, also a presidium member of the Awami League, was addressing the South Asian Neurosurgical Congress and Scientific Conference at a hotel in the city.

He also criticised Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, "for his role" during the political changeover nine years ago and demanded that the Star editor step down.

"You [Mahfuz Anam] have admitted making a mistake for 1/11 period. But just admitting mistake for your role during 1/11 would not do. [you] will have to resign. For your mistake, Sheikh Hasina had to stay in jail for 11 months.

"I was tortured in jail as well... if a responsible man fails to discharge his duties, he must quit," Nasim said.

The Star editor at a talk show on February 3 made an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) cell during the 2007-08 caretaker government's tenure, without being able to verify those independently.

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Yesterday, Nasim said, "During 1/11 period, some conspirators wanted to remove Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia from politics and some evil forces wanted to capture state power. But Sheikh Hasina, through her leadership, restored democracy in the country."

"The country gained independence under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It's the politicians who create a country and work for its development. Therefore, some mistakes could be made by politicians," he told his audience.

Bangladesh Society of Neurosurgeons President Prof. Dr Kanak Kanti Barua presided over yesterday's congress that was participated by 35 foreign surgeons from different countries, including the US, Germany, Turkey, Nepal, India, Japan and Singapore.

SC dissatisfied

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After the day's proceedings, the apex court set today for resuming hearing on the appeal.

Mahbubey Alam told reporters that the apex court may finish the hearing today.

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 on November 2, 2014, sentenced Quasem to death after finding him guilty on 10 charges of abducting, confining and torturing people during the Liberation War.

Earlier, the SC in a verdict on the case against war criminal Delwar Hossain Sayedee castigated the prosecutors and investigators for their poor performance in handling the case.

Workplaces not friendly at all

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Nazrul Islam, assistant sub-inspector at the food ministry, shared a similar experience. He cannot move without a wheelchair.

"Often when I go to other government offices housed in buildings without elevators, even top government officials fail to take my physical challenges into account," he said.

A couple of months back, he went to attend a meeting at another department where the elevator was not working. "When I called the official with whom I had the meeting to come downstairs, he kept me waiting for hours," he said.

Nazrul said even at his own office, which is on the ground floor, there were four steps that one needed to climb. So he built a ramp with his own money to overcome this difficulty.

"I had brought the matter to the notice of the authorities but they did not take any step immediately," he said.

"The problem is with the attitude employers have on persons with physi-

cal challenges. They think such persons should sit idle at home rather than working at office," said Nazrul, recalling how, during job interviews, he found his employers being suspicious of his abilities.

Both Sumi and Nazrul said it was almost impossible for people like them to get a job, especially in the private sector, without sufficient lobbying.

Even the 10% quota reserved for people with disabilities (PWDs) remain unfulfilled, said Nazrul.

Saidul Huq, president of National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD), also said employers "are not mentally prepared" to offer jobs to physically challenged people. When they got a job, colleagues would not show a helpful attitude towards them, he added.

He said that through his organisation, Blind Education and Rehabilitation Development Organisation (Berdo), they "try to lobby for jobs" of about 10-12 persons with visual impairment every year.

Despite employers' reluctance, however, organisations that have employed physically challenged people speak highly of their job performance and loyalty.

Shihabul Kabir, senior assistant manager of Renata Limited, said 16 persons with mental and physical challenges "work at the packing section of the company."

"We did not have to do much adjustment as the working area is on the ground floor. In fact, to some extent, they are better workers, because they do not waste time and they are more dedicated," he said.

But the company does not directly recruit physically challenged people. It recruits them through a non-government organisation called Sajeda Foundation.

Ehatasum Kabir, compliance head of Mohammadi Group where eight physically challenged persons are employed, opined that giving employment to physically challenged people "is not a social responsibility", it's rather an economic responsibility.

"When a person with disability gets a job, he is contributing to the economy and supporting a family, which leads to the economic well-being of the family and, on a larger scale, of the nation," he said.

He, however, noted that physically challenged people should be given work where they feel comfortable.

Saidul of NFOWD said, "If the buildings were constructed following the law, then physically challenged people could easily enter them. And if employers activate free software available online, it helps visually impaired persons to work as efficiently as a person without visual impairment."

At Creative IT Limited, there are many software developers who suffer from hearing impairment. Md Monir Hosen, chairman and CEO of the company, said his employees, especially those with hearing impairment, were doing very well.

"All you need to do is give them proper training," he said.

Mustafizur in spotlight

FROM PAGE 1

not there may be a conversation about whether Shahid Afridi will be able to rediscover his form. At any other time the discussion would centre on these players, but this time there has been a buzz around young Bangladeshi pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman.

In yesterday's pre-match press conference the 20-year old wonder boy's name dominated discussions. Virat Kohli did not hesitate to talk about the Mustafizur threat while Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has no doubt about more wonders from the wonder boy.

But why is this young man the centre of all attraction?

A flashback: June 18, 2015 at Mirpur. A young pacer showed the world how venomous a cutter could be. Simply ask Rohit Sharma, Suresh Raina or MS Dhoni -- who were com-

pletely deceived by the canniness of his cutters. Mustafizur was only the second bowler after Zimbabwe's Brian Vitori to take five-wicket hauls in his first two ODIs and those returns helped his side to a historic series win against India.

Rapidly, his cutter became a topic of conversation among cricket pundits all over the world, if not all his other variations. He is yet to show his ability outside the country but Mustafizur has still been considered as the best young find for the game and already got a place in the ICC ODI Team of the Year in 2015, apart from roping in a contract from the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL).

In this context, the Asia Cup will probably be his biggest challenge to date as, without any doubt, all the teams have already analysed his mysterious cutters and slower deliveries and have done a lot of homework to pre-

pare for him. Will Mustafizur maintain his incisiveness against opponents who know his wiles?

People around him believe that Mustafizur has an extraordinary power to read the batsman and his on-field intelligence is unparalleled. Mashrafe is one of them and that is why the captain has no doubt. "He is only 20 but he is outstanding. He has got some extraordinary variations with the ball. It's normal that people will read him and make his life difficult but I think he is doing pretty good homework."

"Mustafizur is always confident because he has the slower, the cutter; even that ball can be bowled with variations. He doesn't worry about the opponent before a match because he believes in his own deliveries rather than thinking what the batsmen will do, so that is why he remains ahead in the battle and this will take him very

far," continued Mashrafe.

Will too much attention create any pressure on him?

"No, I am a hundred per cent sure he does not know what is being said about him. He is not one to take pressure. Sometimes what happens is that players try to listen to what others say about them, but he is different. He doesn't even care about what others say. So dealing with him is very easy," said a confident Mashrafe.

Kohli showered praises on the young pacer by saying that Mustafizur had spiced the game up a bit more with his sharp weapons. "He is a very exciting bowler and is obviously going to be a big factor for Bangladesh in the tournament," predicted Kohli.

So the Asia Cup will be a tournament for both Bangladesh and its best find to further enhance their already burgeoning reputations.

Bangladesh an attractive destination for business

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of 9,590 Japanese companies in 20 countries in the region and was conducted in October and November last year.

The survey questions were focused on operating profit forecasts, business confidence of CEOs, expansion plan, cost of local production, management concerns, procurement sources and export destination, expectation for economic integration and wages.

Bangladesh is far ahead of Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Pakistan on the cost indicator and is in a better position than Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, Cambodia, India, the Philippines, and China on the labour wage indicator.

However, 69 percent of the CEOs identified the trend of rising wage as the highest concern of management.

The survey said although the Japanese firms in Bangladesh are struggling with operating profits, the good news is business confidence of the Japanese CEOs ranks the highest at 63.3 points, meaning their business performance in Bangladesh will improve in 2016.

It is only 20.7 points and 21.8

points in China and Thailand respectively, indicating that the expectancy of business performance of Japanese firms in the two countries is poor and might not pick up, it added.

Bangladesh was ranked fifth when the Japanese CEOs were asked whether they would expand their operations in the country in future.

More than 67 percent respondents said they would like to expand their footprint in Bangladesh in the next one or two years, thanks to high growth potentials, reduction of cost, reviewing production and distribution network and an easy-to-secure labour force.

Japanese firms, however, showed modest downward trend in the last four to five years in Bangladesh and other countries such as China, Myanmar, Vietnam, India and Thailand.

"Especially since 2013, the downward trend of Bangladesh and China is much severe whereas expectancy for expansion is getting higher in Myanmar," said the survey.

About the opportunities to export to Japan, the survey said the sky is the limit.

The Japanese-affiliated firms in

Bangladesh export 67 percent of their products back to Japan.

"However, the achievement could be many-fold if Bangladesh can connect itself with Asia through free trade agreements," said the survey.

An official of the JETRO Dhaka said Bangladesh should take steps to sign trade deals with ASEAN, where Japanese companies based in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam or Cambodia export significantly.

If there is preferential trade deals, more Japanese companies will come to Bangladesh and export intermediary goods to their plants in the ASEAN countries for producing finished products, he said.

"Time has come for Bangladesh to take the regional connectivity issue seriously," said the official.

In 2014-15, Bangladesh received \$915.22 million for its exports to Japan, according to the commerce ministry.

Exports to Japan have been on the rise due to the relaxation of rules of origin for products from the least-developed countries.

"Considering export destination of Japanese-affiliated firms in Asia and Oceania region, export from

Bangladesh to ASEAN countries is simply 'insignificant', whereas export rate to Japan shows the highest export ratio (71%)," said the survey.

It said compared to the average, Bangladesh is found in a volatile position because of the problems related to quality of employees, competitors, local procurement, and quality control.

More than 57 percent CEOs think quality of employees are not up to the mark in Bangladesh; 50 percent CEOs would like to think more on quality control.

Moreover, 56.3 percent CEOs flagged customs clearance as complicated and 70.6 percent consider local procurement as a big problem.

The survey revealed that 70.6 percent CEOs say in establishing business local procurement is a big matter. Only 22.5 percent Japanese firms operating in Bangladesh procure raw materials and parts locally.

"Huge import dependency on China and less on ASEAN countries have become a matter of concern for CEOs, indicating non-development of supporting industries and an absence of connectivity with ASEAN nations."

Like the previous year, Bangladesh, compared to other neighbouring countries, is in a stressed situation when it comes to making profits.

The country was ranked one of the lowest profit makers, and it lagged behind Pakistan, China, and the Philippines.

The recommendations of the JETRO survey include reducing cost related to start-ups, as Japanese companies are comparatively fresh and young.

It also called for creating environment to help companies cut down operational cost, introducing more investor-friendly policy analysing those of the competitors, and undertaking pro-active initiatives to address and eliminate impediments to doing business.

It said environment should be created to develop supporting industries in order to increase local procurement.

There are 230 Japanese companies doing business in Bangladesh.

JETRO is the official investment and trade promotion organisation of the government of Japan, and has been conducting the survey since 1987.