

Pabna court summons Star editor

STAR REPORT

A Pabna court yesterday summoned The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam on March 24 in a defamation case.

Judge Rezaul Karim of Senior Judicial Magistrate Court-1 passed the order after police submitted an investigation report complying with an earlier order, reports our Pabna correspondent, quoting Shah Alam, president of the district's Bar Association, also a counsel for the plaintiff.

Rejaur Rahim Lal, vice-president of Awami League Pabna unit, lodged the defamation suit with the court on February 16.

In the case statement, the complainant claimed The Daily Star editor defamed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by publishing a few reports based on information supplied by the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) cell during the caretaker government rule in 2007.

So far, Mahfuz Anam faces 79 lawsuits -- 62 defamation suits and 17 pleas for bringing sedition charges.

The Star editor has been facing a barrage of cases since February 9, days after he made an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the 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.

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 were on allegation of corruption against Sheikh Hasina and one involving the then chief conservator of forests, Osman Gani.

The reports were based on the statements of some top Awami League and BNP leaders and businesspersons, who were interrogated by the TFI cell. Numerous cases were filed against senior politicians, including Hasina and Khaleda, mostly based on those statements.

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leaders still face many of those cases, but the cases against Hasina and most other AL leaders were either quashed or withdrawn after the AL took office in 2009.

Presently, the cases being filed against Mahfuz Anam allege that the reports run by this newspaper led to the arrest of AL chief Sheikh Hasina, thus defaming her.

Dropout rate

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shop yesterday at its office to share the findings with different stakeholders.

The report shows that the dropout rate was particularly high among girls, 45.92 percent of whom left education at the secondary level, against 33.72 percent boys.

As for the higher secondary level, the overall dropout rate fell to 22.70 percent in 2015 from 46.86 seven years ago.

"Dropout is a waste and we have been able to reduce this over the years, thanks to different initiatives of the government," said Shamsul Alam, chief of the Statistics Division of Banbeis, while presenting the draft report.

To prepare the report, he said, they collected information from 38,757 educational institutions across the country between October 10 and November 30 last year.

From the primary school to the university level, the total number of students stood at 3.66 crore and the number of educational institutions at 1,60,934 in 2015, according to the report.

Speaking as the chief guest at the programme, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid asked the Banbeis to collect information "more flawlessly" so that the government can formulate policies more accurately.

The report stated that there was one teacher for 41 students in secondary schools while the ratio was 1:21 in madrasa and 1:33 in universities.

Around 68 percent schools have trained teachers and 17.79 percent schools do not have computer facilities.

The number of teachers in Bangladesh was 10,63,718, over 41 percent of them female, the report added.

Education Secretary Sohorab Hossain and Banbeis Director Mohammad Fashiullah also spoke at the programme.

Homage paid

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prayers yesterday. *Milad and doa mahfils* were also organised at Pilkhana, headquarters of the force.

Special *doa and milad mahfil* will also be held at Bir Uttam Fazlur Rahman Khandker auditorium at Pilkhana around 4:45pm today.



A police pick-up, in circle, on the wrong side of the road near a footbridge at Shyamoli in the capital. The photo was taken around 3:35pm yesterday. Another police vehicle going the wrong way ran over and killed a private university student at Kakoli on Monday.

PHOTO: EMRAN HOSSAIN

Media was under pressure

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At that time, Amnesty International didn't issue any statement criticising the repression on the mass media, said Inu as he slammed the AI annual report released on Tuesday.

The minister said the statements issued by several international organisations, including the AI, on Mahfuz Anam are nothing but crocodile tears.

Terming the AI report one-sided, he said it is motivated and disjointed.

Inu alleged that the organisation has taken a stance against Bangladesh's democratic system and is lobbying for "criminals".

He came down heavily on the AI for not issuing any statement on the 1971 genocide, the killing of Bangabandhu and his family members on August 15 in 1975, repression during the tenures of the governments of Ziaur Rahman and Khandaker Mushtaque, and the 2004 grenade attack on the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

They (the AI and other international organisations) are lobbying to protect the 1971 war criminals, he said.

The minister ruled out the AI's claim that not even a single person, directly involved in firebomb attacks during last year's anti-government agitation, was brought to justice.

He said 597 criminals were caught red-handed while throwing petrol bombs. They include 363 activists of the BNP and 205 activists of the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir.

"Not a single BNP and Jamaat leader was arrested for political reasons... All of them were arrested on the basis of specific allegations," he said.

Like politicians, newspaper editors have to maintain a minimum moral standard. If politicians are criticised on moral grounds, newspaper editors can also be criticised on the same grounds, Inu said.

About the prime minister's comment on Mahfuz Anam, Inu said she made the remark not out of anger. It was

about the undemocratic activities of the military-backed 1/11 government, he said.

"There was no personal attack or bad intention in her speech. Her remark rekindled the memories of how the caretaker government took over illegally and imprisoned politicians, businesspeople and others indiscriminately. She didn't speak of taking any political or administrative steps."

What the PM had said regarding the 1/11 was correct, said Inu. "Doesn't the prime minister have the right to tell the truth? he asked.

"Criticism against a certain editor doesn't mean interference or pressure on the media."

Referring to the defamation and sedition pleas against Mahfuz Anam, he said the government itself had not taken any step against the Star editor.

The minister said it is the aggrieved citizens who are filing these cases. "Now the court will decide whether these cases have any merit."

Asked about an alleged directive to private businesses not to give advertisements to The Daily Star and Bangla daily Prothom Alo, he said the government had not issued any such directive.

"The government has no jurisdiction over private sector advertisements. These two newspapers are getting government advertisements regularly."

The minister also claimed the mass media is now enjoying the highest level of freedom in the country's history. And the government has no intention to control it.

On a query about restrictions on The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo in covering PM's programmes and getting access to the PMO and the Gono Bhaban, the minister said the intelligence agencies determine who would be allowed to enter the PMO and the Gono Bhaban.

"Many times even MPs and ministers are barred from entering the PMO."

Inu said the government does not

have any animosity against The Daily Star or the Prothom Alo. "The truth is that important ministers are regularly attending their programmes."

Asked why the government didn't take action against the policymakers of the 1/11 government, he said those who grabbed power illegally and violated the constitution since 1975 would be tried.

The government would consider forming a commission to this effect, added the minister.

NASIM ON JOURNALISTS

Making an oblique reference to journalists, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim said "they are not sent to jail or made to pay compensation" for mistakes, while people in all other professions face jail terms for wrongdoings.

"Politicians, doctors and businesspeople -- all have to go to prison if they make mistakes. But there is a certain community that can resort to character assassination through their writings, but they don't have to go to jail," said the minister.

"They think it is enough to say sorry..." Nasim, also president member of the ruling Awami League, said at a programme at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the capital yesterday.

Bangladesh has made significant progress over the years. But the country could have done a lot better if its democratic journey continued uninterrupted.

Unconstitutional forces came to power several times, and various quarters had their roles in that, he said.

"It is for the people to decide who will form the government. Why should there be seminars and symposiums to facilitate the change of a government? he asked.

"A spade has to be called a spade. None should be belittled," said Nasim.

There will be political crisis in democracies, but that doesn't mean unconstitutional forces will be brought to power, he added.

Family voices

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yesterday told The Daily Star that he could see no visible progress in the case.

"Neither do I nor my family members have any reason to feel satisfied."

He fears that the media focus and law enforcers' interest in the case would fizzle out before the criminals are caught and tried.

On the eve of Avijit's first death anniversary yesterday, Additional Commissioner Monirul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) told journalists that police have identified three suspects who were at the crime scene during the murder.

Terming the murder well-planned, he said the investigation was taking time as those who committed the gruesome killing are "smart and educated".

He added that police have obtained evidence of the involvement of six to seven identified people who abetted the murder by staying at the book fair and Bangla Academy premises at the time.

"They all are members of Ansarullah Bangla Team," he claimed.

Ajoy, however, said, "If the criminals are really identified, they can be tried in absentia."

The bereaved father also voiced his doubt whether the criminals, claimed to have been identified by the detectives, were still in the country.

On July 6 last year, Monirul Islam told journalists that detectives knew the faces and nicknames of seven members who belong to the banned Islamist outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

He had also claimed that the people involved were all educated.

Talking to journalists at the DMP

IS threatens

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latest "rebrand" of IS's supporters online.

And while the direct threat to the two CEOs is unlikely to elicit any new reaction from their respective companies, the video does highlight the continued failure to prevent jihadists from using sites like Twitter and Facebook as a platform.

Text appearing on the video reads: "You announce daily that you suspend many of our accounts, and to you we say: Is that all you can do? You are not in our league."

"If you close one account we will take 10 in return and soon your names will be erased after we delete you [sic] sites, Allah willing, and will know that [sic] we say is true."

Earlier this month, Twitter said it had suspended over 125,000 accounts since the middle of 2015 "for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to Isis".

"We condemn the use of Twitter to promote terrorism and the Twitter Rules make it clear that this type of behavior, or any violent threat, is not permitted on our service," the company said.

Facebook has previously said there is "no place for terrorists on Facebook". Spokesman Andrew Souvall told Wired: "We work aggressively to ensure that we do not have terrorists or terror groups using the site, and we also remove any content that praises or supports terrorism."



Mousumi



Ferdous



Mim

National Film Award 2014 announced

'Brihannala' best film

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday picked 29 artistes and film professionals for National Film Award 2014.

They have been selected for the award in 26 categories for their outstanding contributions to the country's film industry, said an information ministry release.

The awardees are: lifetime achievement - Syed Hasan Imam and Rani Sarker, best film - Brihannala produced by Murad Parvez, best documentary - Gariwala produced by Mohammad Ashraf Alam alias Ashraf Monir, best director - Jahidur Rahman Anjar Meghmaller, best actor Ferdous

Ahmed (EK Cup Cha), best actress - Mousumi (Tarkata) and Bidya Sinha Mim (Jonakir Alo), best side actor - Ezaz Islam (Tarkata), best side actress - Chitra Lekha Guho (Ekattorer Ma Jononi), best villain - Tariq Anam (Desha the leader), best comedy actor - Misha Sawdgor (Olpo Olpo Premier Golpo), best child actor - Abir Hossain Angkon (Baishamya), best child actress (special award) - Marzan Hossain Jara (Meghmaller), best music director - Saim Rana (Nekkabarar Mahaproyan), best singer male - Mahfuz Anam James (Desha the leader), best singer female - Runa Laila (Priya Tumi Sukhi Hou) and Momtaz (Nekkabarar Mahaproyan), best

songwriter - Masud Pathik (Nekkabarar Mahaproyan), best lyricist - Belal Khan (Nekkabarar Mahaproyan), best storywriter - Murad Parvej (Brihannala), best cinematography - Saikat Nasir (Desha the Leader), best dialogue - Murad Parvez (Brihannala), best editor - Towhid Hossain Chowdhury (Desha the leader), best art director - Maruf Samurati (Tarkata), best photographer - Mohammad Hossain Jemy (Baishamya), Best sound recording - Ratan Pal (Meghmaller), best costume and decoration - Kanak Chanpa Chakma (Jonakir Alo) and best makeup man - Andur Rahman (Nekkabarar Mahaproyan).

Court riled

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Tareque is currently at Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he was admitted with "back pain" on January 3. He is being "treated" there at the neurosurgery department.

Yesterday, the judge asked the authorities to explain Tareque's absence, adjourned the court proceedings for half an hour and ordered the public prosecutor to find out why he was not in the court.

He also directed the authorities to take Inspector Ashrafuzzaman in court custody. The police officer was later released after he offered his explanation.

Public Prosecutor Wajed Ali Khokon said that since Tareque was undergoing treatment, the prison authorities did not produce him.

"February 29 has been fixed for next hearing. The court ordered the authorities to bring him on that day even if it requires an ambulance," he added.

During yesterday's proceedings, 22 other accused, including prime accused Nur Hossain and sacked Rab officers Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander SM Masud Rana, were present.

On April 27, 2014, Narayanganj panel mayor Nazrul Islam and his three aides -- Tajul, Liton and Swapan -- and driver Jahangir were kidnapped allegedly by a Rab-11 team. Senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver Ibrahim were also picked up around the same time, as they witnessed the abduction of Nazrul and his men. Later, all the seven bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya.

Days after the murder, Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that some officials of Rab-11 killed Nazrul in exchange for Tk 6 crore from Nur Hossain, Nazrul's political rival.

Two cases were filed in this connection -- one by Nazrul's family and the other by Chandan's family.

Media Centre yesterday, he said DNA evidence from the crime scene was tested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) but police were yet to receive the reports.

He said the reports would let them know who were present at the crime scene.

Monirul said two of the eight arrestees -- Shafiqur Rahman Farabi and Mannan Rahi -- directly instigated the murder.

"The rest are suspects. A few of them might have been present at the crime scene," he said.

Unidentified assailants killed Avijit Roy and badly wounded his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya on Dhaka University campus after the couple came out of the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela on February 26 last year.

The incident happened around 8:45pm on the pavement along Suhrawardy Udyan near TSC.

Two attackers hit Avijit, 42, with machetes from behind, making gaping holes in his head. They hacked his wife when she tried to save him. Bonya, 40, suffered injuries in the head and lost a finger.

A day after the murder, US Department of State Spokesperson Jen Psaki in a statement said Washington was ready to assist the investigation if Bangladesh wanted help.

On March 5, a four-member FBI team arrived in Dhaka to assist the probe.

The Detective Branch of police on March 11 last year handed over the DNA evidence to the FBI. Earlier, a Dhaka court ordered the detectives to get a DNA test done by the US investigation agency.

Detectives pressed charges against 35 people in each case. Of them, 23 accused, including the three sacked Rab officials, are now in jail. Twelve others, eight of them Rab men, are on the run.

"Hearing of both the cases was supposed to be held [yesterday]," said the public prosecutor.

However, it did not happen due to the absence of Tareque and Nazrul's widow Selina Islam Beauty, plaintiff of one case. Selina was not present as she was ill, lawyers said.

Shakhawat Hossain, lawyer for Selina, told The Daily Star, "As far as we know, he [Tareque] was shifted to the hospital without court permission. He is completely well, since prison authorities could not produce any proper document of his illness."

He added the prison authorities "failed" to explain Tareque's condition.

"When the court questioned the police officer responsible for taking him to court from prison, he could not respond properly. The court was irked at him," said Shakhawat.

Khawja Abdul Gafur, assistant director of DMCH, said Tareque had some problems in his spinal cord and that they were examining it.

On condition of anonymity, a hospital source said, "Even though he [Tareque] has a spinal cord injury, he walks and talks normally. But he complains of back pain and high pressure."

Shakhawat said absence of accused persons in court causes delay in the proceedings. As a result, witnesses' confidence in and hope for a fair trial erode.

Meanwhile, Nazrul Islam's father-in-law alleged that Nur Hossain and his men were often threatening them and that they were feeling insecure.

"The special protection given to the plaintiffs and witnesses of the cases was withdrawn in October last year,