

## Digital Security Bill passed

*Concerns of journos, rights activists ignored; opposition MPs raise objection; fear widespread over free speech, independent journalism*

RASHIDUL HASAN

The much-debated Digital Security Bill 2018 was passed in parliament last night with a harsh provision allowing police officials to search or arrest anyone without any warrant.

The bill got through by voice vote amid opposition from a number of Jatiya Party lawmakers, ignoring concern of journalists, owners of media houses and rights activists over some of its sections.

Journalists and rights activists have expressed worries over the new law, saying it was passed without addressing their concern.

They also said the act goes against the main spirit of the constitution and will restrict free-thinking, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. It will also impede independent journalism.

Section 43 of the new law says if a police official believes that an offence under the law has been or is being committed at a certain place, or there is a possibility of committing crimes or destroying evidence, the official can search the place or any person there.

In its final report on September 17, the parliamentary standing committee on posts, telecommunications and information technology ministry recommended that police would have to take permission from the director general of the Digital Security Agency, to be formed under the new law, before arresting anyone under the section.

However, during the bill's passage yesterday, Jatiya Party lawmaker Fakhrul Imam proposed dropping the provision [of taking permission from DG] on grounds that it would hinder law enforcers from "carrying out their duties properly".

Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology Minister Mustafa Jabbar, who placed the bill before the House, then accepted his proposal, which was passed by voice vote.

At a meeting on Sunday, Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council), a platform of the editors of the country's dailies, expressed its surprise, disappointment and shock at the committee's final report.

In a statement, the Parishad said they were "forced to reject the report" as it suggested no fundamental changes to sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the draft act that poses serious threats to freedom of expression

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## THE WAY THEY VIEW IT

This law will hurt the media, democracy and freedom of expression. Citizens and the media will be victimised. Fundamental rights will be curtailed. A sense of fear will grow among people. And the rights guaranteed by the constitution will be curbed. We are moving towards a bad time.



**KHANDAKAR MONIRUZZAMAN**  
ACTING EDITOR OF THE DAILY SANGBAD

The act goes against the spirit of the Liberation War. Independent journalism will be under threat in the coming days. We thought the government would accept our [Sampadak Parishad's] suggestions for the sake of independent journalism, freedom of expression and free thinking, but it did not.



**NAEM NIZAM**  
EDITOR OF BANGLADESH PRATIDIN

Due to the inclusion of Official Secrets Act provisions, this law will not only curb freedom of expression but also undermine the objectives of the Right to Information Act. It will increase the fear created by Section 57. As a result, people will go into further self-censorship.



**JYOTIRMOY BARUA**  
SC LAWYER WORKING ON HUMAN RIGHTS

There is a need for a law to check digital crimes. We feel digital media has to have freedom. However, sometimes we see abuse of press freedom. I hope the law would only be used against digital crimes and would not infringe on freedom of expression.



**IQBAL SOHBAN CHOWDHURY**  
EDITOR OF THE DAILY OBSERVER

It is very regrettable and we are shocked. The concerns expressed by the Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) were not addressed. With regard to the act, we stick to our previous stance. We will decide on the next course of action at a meeting of the Editors' Council.



**SHYAMAL DUTTA**  
EDITOR OF BHORER KAGOJ

It's a sad day for freedom of expression and independent journalism and as such for democracy. This law is incongruent with the intellectual environment of digital age. The growth of digital Bangladesh will be stifled by this Digital Security Act.



**MAHFUZ ANAM**  
GENERAL SECRETARY OF  
SAMPADAK PARISHAD AND EDITOR  
AND PUBLISHER OF THE DAILY STAR

We are saddened and aggrieved. The government hurriedly passed the law, totally ignoring the opinions of Sampadak Parishad, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Association of Television Channel Owners. . . . We fear that independent journalism and freedom of expression as guaranteed by the constitution will be curbed.



**SYED ISHTIAQUE REZA**, VICE PRESIDENT  
OF BFUJ AND EDITOR IN CHIEF OF GAZI TV

We've raised our objections [to the law] with reasons. Yet if our voice remains unheard and a law is passed without taking into consideration people's opinion, they are not passing the law as the people's representatives. . . . This is not the norms of parliamentary democracy.



**SULTANA KAMAL**, RIGHTS ACTIVIST

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## Road Transport Bill gets JS nod

*5 yrs' jail for causing death by reckless driving*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament last night passed two separate bills including the much-anticipated Road Transport Act-2018 amid criticisms over lenient punishments for deaths caused by reckless driving.

The other bill was aimed at recognising the top Qawmi madrasa degree Dawra-e-Hadith as equivalent to postgraduate degrees in Islamic studies and Arabic. (Story on page 3)

The road transport bill moved by Minister Obaidul Quader was unanimously passed by voice vote with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair.

The Road Transport Act-2018 has provisions of five years' imprisonment for causing death by reckless driving, a punishment deemed lenient by road safety campaigners.

The development comes over a month after the cabinet approved the draft law.

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## BNP close to forging 'greater nat'l unity'

*Wants Dr Kamal at helm; 'announcement next week'*

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP is likely to announce its "greater national unity" among different political parties next week as leaders of several parties have "reached a consensus" on some common issues, including holding of the election under a nonpartisan government.

It has also held talks with some left leaning parties who are likely to take part in the "movement for restoring democracy", although they will not be a part of the unity process, party insiders said.

The BNP wants Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain, who recently floated a platform called Jatiya Oikyo Prokriya (national unity process), at the forefront of this unity process.

The Daily Star tried to reach the eminent jurist over the phone and via text messages for his comment on the matter last night, but he did not respond.

"The unity process has almost been finalised. We are hopeful about accomplishing it by the end of this month," BNP Standing Committee Member

Moudud Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury, who is involved in the unity process, said the announcement may come next week.

The BNP has finalised the draft of a seven-point demand that it wants realised together with its partners. It has also finalised the draft of a 12-point vision it seeks to achieve if voted to power, said a senior BNP leader.

The demands are dissolution of parliament before polls schedule, resignation of the government, formation of a polls-time government in consultation with all the political parties, reconstitution of the Election Commission, deployment of army with magistracy power during election, no electronic voting in the election and withdrawal of cases against political leaders.

Juktafront, Democratic Left Alliance, Gonoforum and several other political parties have also made these demands.

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## Govt moves to save Naria from Padma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet committee on purchase yesterday approved a project, involving Tk 1,077.58 crore, for protecting Naria and Jazira upazilas in Shariatpur from Padma erosion.

After the meeting, Nasima Begum, additional secretary of the Cabinet Division, told reporters that the committee in principle selected Khulna Shipyard Ltd for the work through direct purchase method.

An official of the water resources ministry said the work order would be given to the shipyard as soon as possible.

Under the project "protection of the right bank of the Padma in Naria and

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## We firmly believe in press freedom

*PM says, urges responsible media role*



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged journalists to play a constructive and responsible role which would be helpful for the country's development.

"The government firmly believes in freedom of press, but attention needs to be given so that no one can use this with childish attitude," she said.

The PM was speaking at a programme at her office, marking the distribution of assistance among journalists from Bangladesh Journalists' Welfare Trust.

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## India rout Pakistan

AFP, Dubai

India crushed Pakistan by eight wickets in their long-awaited Asia Cup match which failed to live up to its hype in Dubai on Wednesday.

Pace spearhead Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3-15) and part time off-spinner Kedar Jadhav (3-23) sent Pakistan, who won the toss and batted, collapsing to just 162 all out in 43.1 overs at Dubai Stadium.

Skipper Rohit Sharma then struck three sixes and six boundaries in his 39-ball 52 while fellow opener Shikhar Dhawan hit a six and six fours in his 54-ball

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India players celebrate as Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq leaves the field after being dismissed for two during their Asia Cup ODI against India at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Wednesday. India won the match by eight wickets.

## Ousted Pak PM Nawaz released

*Court suspends sentences against Sharifs, grants bail in London property graft case*

AFP, Dawn

Ousted Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and son-in-law Mohammad Safdar, were released from Adiala jail yesterday after a court suspended their respective prison sentences for corruption pending an appeal hearing.

PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif along with senior party leaders reached Adiala jail in the evening to receive Nawaz after the IHC issued their release orders.

A large number of PML-N supporters also gathered outside the prison to receive their supreme leader. Moreover, the workers showered rose petals on the convoy of Nawaz Sharif as it left the prison.

The Sharifs will be taken to Nur Khan Airbase, Chaklala, from where they will be flown to Lahore in a private aircraft. Earlier in the day, the Islamabad High Court division bench comprising Justice Athar Minallah and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the appeals by the Sharifs and Capt Safdar against the verdict announced by an anti-corruption court on July 6.

The accountability court sentenced Sharif and Maryam in absentia to 10 and seven years respectively over properties

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PHOTO: AFP