

## What Facebook’s plan to hire journalists means

AFP, New York

Facebook’s plan to hire professional journalists instead of relying solely on algorithms to deliver news is a positive step but is unlikely to shake up an embattled media industry, analysts say.

The social media giant said Tuesday it would build a small team of journalists to select the top national news of the day “to ensure we’re highlighting the right stories.”

It comes as the US media landscape is plagued by job losses and newspaper closures, with organizations trying to figure out how to record profits in the age of free news.

## Take time-bound

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Bangladesh acceded to “the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment” on October 5, 1998. According to article 19, paragraph 1, of the Convention, the state party was obligated to submit its initial report by November 4, 1999.

At the press conference, Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna said the UN body in its concluding observations has made 77 recommendations for Bangladesh.

The body has highlighted three areas as “priority issues” and asked the government to show, after one year, in a report what progress it has made on those issues, he said while reading out a statement.

The issues are: following the High Court directives to end custodial torture and death, establishing a mechanism to investigate allegations raised by detainees, and giving protection to those NGOs which are helping CAT, he added.

“Incidents of rights violation are mostly committed by state machineries,” said Panna, also chairperson of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, stressing the need for ending such violation.

Addressing the press conference, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said a section of law enforcement agency members was playing such roles “as if they were violators rather than protectors of law”.

“My concern is, if this continues and cannot be controlled effectively, then there will be a time when their names have to be changed. The name of ‘law enforcement agency’ has to be changed to ‘law violation agency’,” he added.

No one wants to see law enforcement agency members play such role, he said, adding that the CAT in its concluding observations has made recommendations to attach importance, among others, to political will.

Iftekharuzzaman said besides departmental probes, there should be objective and independent investigations over allegations against law enforcement agency members.

Outcomes of departmental probes often resulted in “closing” or “transferring” or at best sending the members in question to retirement. This seemed to be a “reward”, he added.

He also emphasised the importance of conducting judicial probes over such allegations, mentioning that the UN body has also stressed the need for forming an independent body to probe various allegations against law enforcement agency members.

While noting information provided by the state party’s delegation that 17 cases have been filed against members of law enforcement agencies under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act-2013, says the CAT.

However, the UN body expressed concern that “further information about these cases is not publicly available and was not provided by the delegation, and at reports it has received that no case filed under the act has been completed since its enactment.”

It further showed concern at reports that officials from the police and other authorities have repeatedly requested that the act be amended or repealed to shield certain forces from liability under the act or to limit the scope of conduct prohibited by the law.

Pointing to the government’s “denial attitude” over issues related to torture, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said the government’s image could have been positive if it had accepted the allegations and made pledges before the UN body to correct those.

She added that the government should see the country’s rights activists as its allies in combating such incidents.

Zakir Hossain, executive director of Nagorik Uddyog, said the home ministry has to play a strong role in ending custodial torture and other rights violations committed by law enforcement agency members.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adibasi Forum, praised the government’s positive initiatives, which were welcomed by the CAT, like the state’s accession to and ratification of different international human rights instruments.



Israeli border police members detain a demonstrator as a medic tries to help him during a protest in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, near Israel's Ofer Prison in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Study finds reasons

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at the Bangabandhu International convention Centre in the capital.

Some other causes behind the piles of pending cases include shortage of judges, lack of coordination among different government departments and a section of lawyers’ unwillingness to settle the case within a short time.

Chief judicial magistrates, district and session judges of different districts were present at the event.

According to the audit, 67 percent of the nearly 1,500 respondents said they had faith on the judicial system. But only 13 percent of them prefer going to courts while the rest would rather have community leaders solve their disputes.

The report identified the time consuming and costly nature of legal procedures behind people’s unwillingness to seek legal support.

According to the report, in most cases, it took two to five years to settle a case for which, people involved had to visit courts for 20 to 25 times.

On average, it took more than Tk 25,000 to settle a case, said the audit report.

The courts have a backlog of 35 lakh cases and the situation could have been much worse if everyone went to the courts with their issues, it observed.

The magistrate courts alone had 14 lakh cases pending in 2016.

The rate of disposal of cases in the magistrate courts was only three percent.

The findings were presented by ATM Morshed Alam, project manager of Justice Reform and Corruption Prevention at the GIZ.

The number of cases pending with chief judicial magistrates’ courts increased by 14 percent between 2016 and 2017. At the session judges’ courts and the High Court Division, pending cases rose by 16 and nine percent respectively.

If the growth of pending cases continue at this pace, the audit projected that by 2022, chief judicial magistrates’ courts, session judges’

courts and the High Court Division would have 72, 82, and 89 percent of their cases pending.

The backlogs cause unbearable sufferings for justice seekers and increase the prison population rapidly, the audit report said.

The audit found that most of the rural people preferred seeking justice from community and local representatives as they considered the process is less complex and faster.

Around 1,883 cases remain pending with a judge on an average.

At yesterday’s programme, Law Minister Anisul Huq said people will lose their confidence on judiciary if the piles of cases kept getting bigger.

Promita Sengupta, head of programme (rule of law) at the GIZ Bangladesh; Golam Sarwar, secretary (in-charge, law and justice division) at the law ministry; Zakir Hossain, registrar general at the Supreme Court; Burkhard Ducoffre, deputy ambassador at German Embassy also spoke at the programme.

## 3 killed in ‘gunfights’

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Hoaikong Urubunia Katakhal area after a tip-off about a large amount of yaba being smuggled from there, said BGB-2 Deputy Commander Major Shanful Islam Jamaddar.

The BGB members signalled a boat to stop on the Naf River. But the smugglers ignored the signal and opened fire, triggering a gunfight, he claimed.

“Alam and Sarker were killed during the shootout,” Maj Shariful said, adding that BGB members recovered the bodies and sent them to a local hospital for autopsy.

The BGB claimed to have recovered fifty-thousand yaba pills, a gun, three cartridges and two sharp weapons from the boat.

Meanwhile a man accused of murder was killed in a reported gunfight with the detective branch (DB) of police at the Chakua Daria intersection in Mymensingh’s Gafargaon upazila early yesterday.

The incident took place nearly two days after he was allegedly picked up by plainclothes men.

The dead was identified as Ekhlash Uddin, 32, of Chakua village.

Ekhlash was the prime suspect in a case filed with Pagla Police Station in the upazila for stealing an auto-rickshaw after killing its driver, Sujon Mia, 20, on July 27.

Speaking to this correspondent,

Ekhlash’s father Nurul Islam, said Ekhlash was a ruling party activist and three young men, who he was familiar with, came to their house and asked him to go out with them.

Ekhlash then went to Sadua Marker Bazar on his motorbike around 3:00pm on Tuesday.

“Around 4:00pm, we were informed that plainclothes men picked him up. His mobile phone was switched off since then,” said Nurul.

“I also asked the young men who took Ekhlash out about where he is but they could not say. Even the motorbike is yet to be recovered,” he added.

Nurul further said that they searched for Ekhlash at Pagla Police Station, the DB office in Mymensingh and even at Mymensingh Central Jail on Wednesday but could not trace him.

Police also denied picking him up.

The family then decided to lodge a general diary with local police station yesterday but around 4:00am, they heard the news of Ekhlash’s death on television.

Later, they came to MMCH morgue and identified the body, said the father.

Nurul also alleged, one of three men who came, named Liton, earlier attacked Ekhlash over rivalry one year ago and a case was filed with the local police station accusing five people where Liton was the prime suspect.

“Because of the rivalry, Ekhlash

might have been killed in a planned way,” alleged Nurul, while demanding proper investigation into the killing.

Shah Kamal Akanda, officer-in-charge on Mymensingh DB, said Ekhlash went into hiding since the murder case was lodged in July.

Tipped off, a police team conducted a drive in the area around 1:30am to arrest Ekhlash. Sensing police presence, criminals opened fire at police, triggering a “gunfight”, the OC claimed.

When other gang members fled the area, police found bullet-hit Ekhlash and rushed him to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 3:00am, the OC added.

Police also claimed to have recovered a pistol with one round of bullets and 200 grams of heroin from the spot.

Ekhlash was accused in six cases, including three for robbery, two for drugs while another for murder, filed with different police stations in Mymensingh, said officer-in-charge (Investigation) of Pagla Police Station Md Fayeaz Rahman.

About the cases, Ekhlash’s father said the cases were filed only to harass his son.

[Our Cox’s Bazar and Mymensingh correspondents contributed to the report]

## Trump under fire from American Jews over ‘disloyalty’ remark

AFP, New York

US President Donald Trump has been hit by a wave of criticism for accusing Jewish Democratic voters of “disloyalty,” but his comment also highlighted the unease of some in the community with its traditional party of choice.

Trump, who has positioned himself as a staunch ally of Israel, made the remark on Tuesday night while criticizing Democratic politicians who support a boycott of the Jewish state.

“Where has the Democratic party gone?” Trump said, adding: “I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat, I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty.”

Asked about the comments before flying to Kentucky the following day, Trump -- in typical fashion -- doubled down: “You vote for a Democrat, you’re being very disloyal to Jewish people and you’re being very disloyal to Israel.”

Members of America’s more than five million-strong Jewish community -- 80 percent of whom voted Democratic in the 2018 mid-term elections, according to the Pew Research Center -- have denounced his notion of loyalty and blamed the president for fuelling anti-Semitism.

“It’s a bit unclear what the president was trying to say in terms of who Jews are disloyal to... While he wasn’t exactly clear about that, I will be exactly clear on what that was: anti-Semitic,” Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, said on CNN.

The president “has no right to tell Jewish Americans he knows what is best for us or to demand our loyalty,” said Halie Soifer, executive director for the Jewish Democratic Council of America.

Criticism of Trump has multiplied

on Twitter under the hashtags #DisloyaltoTrump as well as #KingofIsrael, after the president approvingly tweeted a quote in which he was referred to by that title.

But beyond the latest controversy, some New York Jews say they feel growing unease with certain positions taken by the Democratic Party.

Trump “shouldn’t have said it,” said Ben Mizrachy, a retired 80-year-old. “I don’t like the Jews to be taken into political party discussions.”

“But the truth of the matter is, that some Jews, even those who have always voted Democrat like myself, are being disappointed with the Democratic party” because its leadership is not reacting enough to what seems like anti-Semitism from some of its members, he said.

The gap between Democrats and Israel “has happened over time but it’s been more dramatic over the past four to eight years,” said Shmuel Asher, 35.

Although registered as a Democrat, Asher, who is responsible for financial aid at Baltimore College, said he is ready to support Trump in the 2020 presidential election.

He put that support down in part to two steps taken by Trump: moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, which had been criticized by Israel.

At 73 years old, Susan Bardfield remains firmly a Democrat, and more anti-Trump than ever: “He is an idiot, nothing that comes out of his mouth helps.”

But the retiree recognizes that Jews “are not a united bloc,” and, like the rest of the country, are especially divided when it comes to Trump.

“Most of the Jews I know voting for Trump are only doing it for Israel,” she said.

“As they say, if you have five Jews in a room, you will have six opinions.”

## Biman dreams big

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improve passenger services, she added.

Meanwhile, a Biman official yesterday said “Gangchil” would primarily fly on Dhaka-Abu Dhabi route.

Speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, he said following the commissioning of the new aircraft, the Biman will now operate seven flights to Abu Dhabi from Dhaka each week, up from six flights. Besides, the “Gangchil” will operate on Dhaka-London route.

Biman has also planned to operate flights on the new Dhaka-Madina route with the modern aircraft in a month or two, he added.

‘A SYMBOL OF INDEPENDENCE’

Describing Biman as a symbol of the country’s independence, Hasina yesterday said people across the globe can know about Bangladesh and respect the country through Biman as its aircraft fly to various destinations across the world.

She asked all involved with the Biman to operate its flights sincerely.

Talking about the newly-inducted Dreamliners “Akash Beena”, “Hangsabalaka” and “Gangchil”, the PM said it is the responsibility of all to take good care of the new aircraft. “You will have to work keeping in mind that these [aircraft] are the assets of the country.”

Hasina said her government gives special attention to modernising Biman Bangladesh Airlines. She described various steps taken for Biman’s development.

She said Bangladesh used to borrow money from foreign sources for the Biman, but the government has now decided to procure aircraft

taking loan from local banks. “Thus we are making our efforts and moving forward step by step.”

Mentioning that the government would procure more aircraft to enhance Biman’s capacity, the PM said the government has already decided to procure two cargo planes to give a boost to export and import.

She elaborated her government’s initiatives for the development of the country’s airports. She said the previous Awami League government had made international airports in Chattogram and Sylhet after assuming power in 1996.

She said the government is constructing a large international airport in Cox’s Bazar considering its location on international air routes and the district’s tourist attractions.

Hasina commissioned “Gangchil” by cutting a ribbon at the Dhaka airport around 11:30am. She also boarded and inspected the state-of-the-art aircraft.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali, Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Md Mohibul Haque, Chairman of the Biman Board of Directors Air Marshal (retd) Muhammad Enamul Bari, and Biman Managing Director and CEO Farhat Hassan Jamil, among others, spoke at the event.

The third Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, the 15th aircraft of the national flag carrier, was added to the Biman’s fleet on July 25. It arrived in Dhaka from the Boeing factory in the USA’s Seattle in the afternoon that day.

The prime minister named all the Dreamliners, sources said.

## MIT professor quits in protest over lab links to Epstein

AFP, New York

The head of a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has said he will quit in protest after the revelation of financial ties between the institution and disgraced hedge fund manager Jeffrey Epstein.

Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at the MIT Media Lab, said he would leave at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year after finding out that lab director Joi Ito took money from Epstein, who committed suicide in prison on August 10 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

“My logic was simple: the work my group does focuses on social justice and on the inclusion of marginalized individuals and points of view,” Zuckerman wrote in a message posted on the Medium forum Tuesday and added to Wednesday.

“It’s hard to do that work with a straight face in a place that violated its own values so clearly in working with Epstein and in disguising that relationship.”

Zuckerman said he had apologized to the three recipients of the Media Lab’s 2018 “Disobedience Prize” who were recognized for their fight against sexual harassment in the science world.

“For me, the deep involvement of Epstein in the life of the Media Lab is something that makes my work impossible to carry forward there,” Zuckerman said.

Researcher J. Nathan Matias, a visiting scholar at the lab, said he was also resigning following the revelations about Ito’s ties with Epstein.

Matias was working on a project conducting research on protecting women and other vulnerable people from online abuse and harassment.