

SC BAR ASSOCIATION A section of lawyers seeks to hold fresh election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of Supreme Court lawyers yesterday announced they would hold a fresh election to the Supreme Court Bar Association on June 14 and 15, saying that what took place on March 15 and 16 was not an election.

They made the decision at a meeting at the SCBA Hall with former SCBA president M Amir Ul-Islam in the chair.

They formed an ad-interim committee with senior lawyer Mohammad Mohsen Rashid as the convener and Shah Ahmed Badal as the member secretary.

The committee will conduct the annual election in line with the SCBA constitution.

Eminent jurists Dr Kamal Hossain, M Amir-Ul-Islam, Mainul Hossain, Jamir Uddin Sircar, AF Hassan Ariff, Zainul Abedin, Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan, AJ Mohammad Ali, MK Rahman and Abu Sayeed Sagar were named as the advisory council members of the committee, said a press release signed by Shah Ahmed Badal.

Forms will soon be handed to lawyers to prepare a voter list.

The committee will meet the chief justice and conduct the routine tasks that include looking after SCBA bank accounts and its office.

SCBA officials and staff members will function under the ad-interim committee, the press release added.

On March 15 and 16, the SCBA election was held amid police assault on lawyers and journalists and clashes between pro-Awami League and pro-BNP lawyers.

Pro-BNP lawyers did not cast their votes, demanding cancellation of what they said was a “farce of an election”. The pro-AL lawyers’ panel, Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad, won all 14 posts of the SCBA polls.

Asked about yesterday’s decisions,

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Boatloads of watermelon at Boithkata floating wholesale market in the Belua river of Pirojpur’s Nazirpur upazila. The market is only open on Saturdays and Tuesdays and watermelons from Bhola, Patuakhali and Barguna are sold there. Over 1 lakh watermelons worth Tk 1 crore are sold every day, say traders. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

Philippine ferry fire kills 31

AFP, Manila

At least 31 people died and 230 were rescued after a fire engulfed a ferry in the southern Philippines, authorities said yesterday.

The Lady Mary Joy 3 was travelling from Zamboanga City on Mindanao Island to Jolo Island in Sulu province when the fire broke out late Wednesday, prompting passengers to jump overboard, disaster officer Nixon Alonzo said.

Rescuers, including the Philippine Coast Guard and fishermen, saved 195 passengers and 35 crew as the blaze ripped through the ferry off Baluk-Baluk Island in Basilan province.

Basilan Governor Jim Salliman said 31 bodies had been retrieved, including 18 found inside an air-conditioned cabin.

Photos released by the coast guard showed one of its vessels spraying water on the burning ferry as personnel in smaller boats plucked people from the dark water.

Firefighter Jayson Ahijon, who was among the passengers, said people panicked as fire and thick smoke overwhelmed the vessel.

Some jumped overboard before putting on life jackets. “It’s beyond my imagination, the fire was spreading so fast,” Ahijon, 36, said.

Ahijon said he and several coast guard officers helped other passengers to safety, including a baby they put in a bucket and lowered over the side of the boat.

The captain ran the vessel aground as the fire spread “so many more could survive since it would be easier to swim to shore”, Commodore Rejard Marfe from

the Philippine Coast Guard told AFP.

Salliman said at least three children, including a six-month-old baby, were among the dead.

Authorities also said 14 people were injured.

It is not clear how many people are still missing, Salliman said the number of passengers on the vessel exceeded the 205 listed in the ship’s manifest.

Marfe said four members of the coast guard and an unknown number of army personnel were on board but not listed in the manifest.

“We’re still getting the data in Coast Guard Station Zamboanga because that’s where they originated in order to determine if there are still missing people,” he said.

Marfe said coast guard investigators were on their way to inspect the ferry and determine the cause of the fire.

Survivors were taken to Zamboanga and Basilan, where the injured were treated for burns, Salliman said.



Shams sent to jail 35hrs

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the paper and the reporter.

According to the document, the case was filed with Ramna Police Station at 11:10pm on Wednesday. Shams was still allegedly in CID custody then.

Early Wednesday, a Jubo League leader named Syed Golam Kibria first accused him in a case under the DSA filed with Tejgaon Police Station.

Shams was picked up less than two hours after the case was filed.

According to the first information report of the second case, a lawyer named Abdul Malek Mashur Malek, 61, accused Shams, Matiur and the unnamed others of using print, online, and electronic media to tarnish the image of the state.

During the hearing yesterday, Ehsanul Haque Shomaji, lawyer for the accused, told the court the complainant was not harmed by the news run by Prothom Alo and the state could take actions against the reporter if the news tarnished its image.

“If my client gets bail, he will not flee and hamper the investigation,” said the lawyer in his submission.

A prosecutor then said police arrested the accused on specific charges and the case was at the primary stage of investigation. The prosecutor appealed to the court to confine him in jail until the investigation is done.

Upon hearing from both sides, the magistrate turned down the bail plea.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said he heard more cases were being filed over a report published on Prothom Alo on Independence Day.

Shams, aged 37, is the younger brother of the slain Detective Branch assistant commissioner Robiul Karim, who died at the Holy Artisan Bakery during the terrorist attack on July 1, 2016.

RELEASED, YET NOT RELEASED

At 12:36am yesterday, Shams called a senior colleague at Prothom Alo and said a CID team was about to drop him off in front of the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

His colleagues rushed to the BICC, but could not find him there.

According to a forwarding letter by Ramna police submitted before the court yesterday, police arrested Shams near the BICC around 12:30am.

Contacted, Umme Salma, widow of Shams’ brother, said she did not understand why the CID dropped him off after midnight in a quiet place from where another agency picked him up.

Noab, editors, rights bodies voice worries

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and release of Prothom Alo reporter Shamsuzzaman Shams. We also demand withdrawal of all cases against journalists,” read the statement, signed by Noab President AK Azad.

The Editors’ Council has expressed concern over the filing of the case against the Prothom Alo editor under the DSA and sending of its reporter to jail.

The council in a statement yesterday said they issued another statement on Wednesday demanding scrapping of all cases against journalists filed under the DSA.

“But it was unfortunate that Shamsuzzaman was sent to jail after his bail petition was rejected,” read the press release signed by Editors’ Council President Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud.

A case was filed against daily Jugantaor Staff Reporter Mahbubul Alam Bablu under the DSA yesterday. “Editors’ Council thinks that filing of cases under the Digital Security Act one after another is a massive blow to the newspaper industry and freedom of expression,” said the release.

The law minister had talked about amending the DSA to prevent its misuse and also promised that the law won’t be used arbitrarily against journalists. But the Editors’ Council is observing with great concern that cases are being filed against journalists under this law even after the assurance, read the statement.

“These activities are clear examples of threat to the freedom of press,” the council said.

ARTICLE 19, an international human rights organisation, has expressed deep concern over the suing of the Prothom Alo editor under the DSA.

Faruq Faisel, regional director of ARTICLE 19 (South Asia), said, “Filing a case against Matiur Rahman under DSA is an example of weaponising law to victimise journalists, communicators and editors. It’s a clear signal of threat and fear to the media actors of the country.”

“This continuation of legal harassment by abusing legal instruments must be stopped as this kind of action is hampering the image of Bangladesh globally as a democratic country,” he said in a press statement.

Different international and local rights organisations yesterday also condemned the arrest of Shams and his production before a Dhaka court 35 hours after his detention.

The Media Freedom Coalition in Bangladesh said it was concerned by the recent reports of violence against and intimidation of journalists.

In a statement issued by 12 member states of the coalition, the MFC in Bangladesh pointed out recent instances, including the detention of journalist Shams, and urged the authorities to investigate the instances impartially.

“We, the undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition in Bangladesh, are concerned about recent reports of violence against and intimidation of journalists, including violence directed at reporters covering the Supreme Court elections, an assault on the brother of a London-based journalist for Al Jazeera, the attack on a Dhaka Tribune photojournalist, and the recent reported detention of a Prothom Alo journalist. We urge the authorities to investigate each of these instances promptly and impartially,” the statement said.

The signatories to the statement are Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US.

The European Union in Bangladesh in a post on their verified Facebook page said, “Arrests of, and criminal proceedings against, journalists in any country warrant particular scrutiny and attention.”

‘CLEARLY AN ACT OF INTIMIDATION’

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has called for the immediate release of journalist Shams, who was arrested early Wednesday after being sued in a case filed under the DSA.

“Make no mistake, the arrest of Shamsuzzaman Shams and the case filed against Matiur Rahman have no legal basis and are clearly an act of intimidation by the government towards all journalists,” says the Paris-based organisation in a statement.

“We demand that the charges filed against them be dropped at once and, with less than a year to go to parliamentary elections, we call on Sheikh Hasina’s government to respect journalistic pluralism and independence, or else these elections will lack all democratic credibility.”

The RSF sent an email yesterday to Additional Inspector General of Police Mohammad Ali Mia, also the head of Criminal Investigation Department, asking on what evidence he based his decision to order Shams’ arrest, read the statement.

The email has so far remained unanswered while Shams has not been allowed to see a lawyer, it added.

Condemning the arrest of the Prothom Alo reporter, Transparency International Bangladesh in a statement demanded immediate and unconditional release of Shams and scrapping of the DSA.

“Shams was produced before the court 30 hours after he was picked up and the fact that he was missing in the meantime is condemnable,” TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said.

The arrest of journalist Shams not only violates his constitutional right to safety as a citizen but also sets a negative example of media control and punishment, the graft watchdog said.

According to law, if a person is legally detained, then s/he must be produced before a court within 24 hours of detention. But the law enforcement agency has clearly failed to do it, said the TIB executive director.

In addition, the case, for which the reporter was taken to the court, was filed more than 20 hours after he was picked up, he added.

If any media publishes a report that goes against the ethics of journalism, any aggrieved parties should address their concerns through the Bangladesh Press Council, said Iftekharuzzaman.

But the direct arrest of a reporter under non-bailable sections of the DSA, without regard for the Press Council, demonstrates the government’s intention to exert control over the media and punish those who express criticism or dissent. It is a violation of the freedom of the media, the TIB statement reads.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Sujon) said “repressive laws” like the DSA act are formulated to curb the freedom of mass media and expression. It also threatens journalists’ professional security.

Rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) in a statement said the act of picking up the Prothom Alo journalist without warrant is “repressive and encourages anti-liberation activities”.

Referring to the law minister’s previous assurance of adopting special caution before accepting cases against journalists under the DSA, the ASK said, “There was no reflection of it in the recent incidents. Rather, the comments of high-ups and responsible persons about the

2 run over by train in Joypurhat

BSS, Joypurhat

Two people were crushed under the wheels of a train in two separate places in the Joypurhat district yesterday.

Santahar Railway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mukter Hossain said a man was crushed under the Barendra Express in the Bagjana Khirarpukur area in Panchbibi upazila of the district last morning.

The victim could not be immediately unidentified, the OC added.

Meanwhile, an elderly woman was crushed under the Barenrade train near Teghor rail gate in Sadar upazila.

She was identified as Durgarani, 70.

Man to die for killing parents in Sylhet

BSS, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his parents in 2020 in the district’s Golapganj upazila.

Senior Sessions Judge Moshir Rahman Chowdhury handed down the verdict to Atik Hossain Khan, 35, from Sunampur village of the Upazila.

According to the prosecution, on March 27 in 2020, Atik hacked his father Abdul Karim Khan and his mother Minara Begum to death over a land dispute.

Following the murder, Atik’s brother Delwar Hossain filed a case with Golapganj Police Station.

Fire breaks out at scrap material shop in Bhatara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out at a scrap material shop in the capital’s Bhatara area last afternoon.

The fire was brought under control around 3:45pm.

Four firefighting units rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control that originated at the tin-shed shop around 3:00pm, said Anisur Rahman, duty officer of the Fire Service and Civil Defence control room.

The cause of the fire could not be known immediately.

There were no reports of casualties.