

Editors Guild, DUTA slam Prothom Alo report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criticising a report of the Prothom Alo for not maintaining the highest standards of journalism, the Editors Guild Bangladesh yesterday said publishing the report on the Independence Day was inappropriate. Editors Guild Bangladesh President Mozammel Babu and General Secretary Inam Ahmed in a statement said the March 26 report was tantamount to undermining the great independence.

"Nobody is above the law. However, we are calling for soliciting opinion from the Press Council before filing any case if anyone feels aggrieved at any report run by any mainstream media outlet," they said.

In another statement, Dhaka University Teachers Association yesterday said the Prothom Alo report mocked the country's independence.

"At a time when the news of Bangladesh's economic turnaround after fighting the crisis stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine war is being circulated across the international media outlets, the attempt to make the state ineffective in the name of opposing the government through a national daily cannot be accepted in any way. We urge everyone not to get confused by such news..." read the statement, signed by DUTA President Nizamul Haque Bhuiyan and General Secretary Zeenat Huda.

The statement, however, didn't mention the name of the Prothom Alo.

Blinken affirms Israel ties

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday pledged enduring ties with Israel but warned against inflaming tensions with the Palestinians, following a rare public spat between the allies.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to step back from a bid to weaken the judiciary that has set off massive protests.



Students of Jahangirnagar University blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway in front of the university main gate yesterday, demanding Prothom Alo reporter Samsuzzaman Shams, who was arrested in a DSA case, be released by tomorrow and the act be scrapped. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

ChatGPT blocked in Italy

AFP, Rome

Italy's privacy watchdog said yesterday it had blocked the controversial robot ChatGPT, saying the artificial intelligence app did not respect user data and could not verify users' age.

The decision "with immediate effect" will result in "the temporary limitation of the processing of Italian user data vis-a-vis OpenAI", the Italian Data Protection Authority said.

The agency has launched an investigation. ChatGPT, created by US startup OpenAI and backed by Microsoft, can answer difficult questions clearly, write code, sonnets, or essays -- even passing difficult exams for students.

But the app that appeared in November is controversial, with teachers fearing students will use it to cheat, and policymakers concerned about the spread of misinformation.

The watchdog said that on March 20, the app experienced a data breach involving user conversations and payment information.

It said there was no legal basis to justify "the mass collection and storage of personal data for the purpose of 'training' the algorithms underlying the operation of the platform".

It also said that since there was no way to verify the age of users, the app "exposes minors to absolutely unsuitable answers compared to their degree of development and awareness."

It said the company had 20 days to respond how it would address the watchdog's concerns, under penalty of a 20-million-euro (\$21.7 million) fine, or up to 4 percent of annual revenues.

The blocking of ChatGPT in Italy comes days after the European policing agency Europol warned that criminals were set to use the app to commit fraud and other cybercrimes, from phishing to malware.

Child killed in Joypurhat road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A child was killed when a speedy tractor hit a batter-run three-wheeler in Joypurhat Sadar yesterday.

The dead is Nusrat Jahan Ruma, 3, daughter of Ruhul Amin, of Masterpara in the upazila, said police.

The girl was returning home from her grandparent's place with her mother by the batter-run three-wheeler, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Joypurhat Sadar Police Station.

As the vehicle reached Puranpoil village, a speedy tractor hit it on Joypurhat-Hilil road, leaving the girl dead on the spot, he added.

Police seized the tractor but the driver fled.

Man killed by lightning strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A man was killed after being hit by lightning strike in Kishoreganj's Pakundia upazila yesterday morning.

Mehdi Hasan Siam, 21, of Jangalia village, was a vegetable trader, said police.

He was hit by lightning strike while going to his store at Kawna Natun Bazar. Locals found his body and informed police.

The law enforcers then recovered the body and handed it over to his family members. An unnatural death case was filed in this connection.

Chonpara's Bazlu dies at DMCH

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Bazlur Rahman alias Bazlu, a member of local union parishad in Narayanganj's Rugganj, who was arrested by Rab in a drug and arms case, died while undergoing treatment under the custody of Dhaka Central Jail.

He died at the Intensive Care Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH police outpost.

Bazlu was a member of ward 9 of Kayetpara Union Parishad of Rugganj upazila and a member of upazila Awami League.

He came into limelight when the drugs issue of Chonpara Rehabilitation Centre was raised regarding the death of Buet student Fardeen Noor Parash.

Bazlu was arrested from Purbagram area of Chonpara in a raid by Rab-1 on November 18 afternoon.

Missing Chinese crewman found dead at Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Members of river police and coast guard yesterday recovered the body of a Chinese crewman who went missing in the Bay on Tuesday.

The dead is Zhang Mingyan, 43, engineer of MV Cang Huan.

The body was sent to a hospital morgue for autopsy, said Abu Jahed, officer-in-charge of Patenga Police Station.

The body would be sent handed over following proper procedures, he added.

A life of dreams, despairs ends

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She got a job as a teacher at Daffodils School in Naogaon town and started raising her son alone renting a house in Chalkdeb Jonokolyanpara area.

In 2008, she got a job of an office assistant at the DC's office.

Later, Sultana worked at different land offices in Sadar and Mohadebpur upazilas in the district before joining Naogaon municipality Chandipur union land office in 2022.

"As she continued her job and raised her son, she also studied," her house owner Delwar Hossain Dulal said.

She completed her bachelor's degree before 2016 when her son passed SSC.

"She would never deviate from her daily routine," Dulal said.

Every day, she went out for office between 9:00am and 9:30am and return between 6:00pm and 6:30pm.

"I never found her absent at work since I joined eight months ago," said Kazi Rafiul Alam, her boss at the land office.

On holidays, she would study and stay with her son.

She completed her post-graduation

in social science from the Open University last year and her son is now a third-year student of fine arts at Chittagong University.

"She used to tell us that her only wish was to see her son established," Dulal said. "Now nobody knows what will happen to him."

Montu said Sultana was to get a promotion next year while her son was due to complete his university degrees in a few years. "The boy now talks to nobody. He will only give a blank stare if you ask him anything."

Sultana's rented house is locked while her son is staying with a relative.

The woman was also vocal about working women's rights and leader of several professional organisations.

She took charge as the women affair's secretary of Naogaon chapter of Bangladesh 4th Class Government Employees' Association only seven days before her death, said Zahangir Alam, general secretary of the unit.

She was also holding the same position at II-20 Grade Government Employees' Allied Rights Forum and 17-20 Grade Employees' Association in the last three terms.

Shams' arrest

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proper form. That means any use of this draconian law is misuse. It needs to be scrapped," he said.

He said Shams was not arrested by the police, but "abducted".

"He was a victim of enforced disappearance for hours. As per the directives issued by the Supreme Court in the Blast vs Bangladesh case, police could have arrested him without warrant only under section 54 of the CrPC.

"The law has been used as an effective tool for violation of the fundamental rights of the journalist. He became a victim even before being implicated in a specific case, and this serious violation of law needs special consideration."

Info minister

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Sheikh Hasina after the Covid pandemic.

He also referred to a recent report of Bloomberg that made a predication on victory of Hasina in the next national election.

About the statement issued by 12 countries, including the US, over the arrest of Prothom Alo reporter Samsuzzaman Shams, the minister said, "It is not appropriate for diplomats to interfere in our internal affairs. They will be reminded of the Vienna Convention on the Conduct of Diplomats when it is necessary."

It contradicts constitutional

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abuse of the Digital Security Act for persecution of the media, he observed.

The unspeakable treatment of the reporter and the lodging of DSA cases against him and others, including the Prothom Alo editor, are also contradictory to the constitutional obligation to free media, he said.

"This is not the first time such targeted abuse of power in the hands of law enforcement agencies have taken place for controlling and intimidating the media. In continuation of the ominous trend since the DSA was enacted, two more journalists were subjected to

violence and intimidation under the DSA a few days earlier," said the executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

Holding Shams for 30 hours following "abduction" also violated the legally mandated time limit to produce any accused before court even if the person is detained lawfully, Ittekkharuzzaman said.

"This is a disgraceful and disturbing violation of law by agencies whose responsibility it is to protect the law," he said, adding that this is an example of persecution and intimidation of the media or anyone exercising the right to dissent and freedom of opinion.

This shows space

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"unfortunate, unexpected and shocking", he said journalists would take a message from the incidents and start practicing more self-censorship.

He said the Digital Security Act is curbing the freedom of the media and it should be scrapped immediately.

"This law is being misused. Any individual is filing a case under the DSA and journalists are being arrested. In some cases, we are seeing people being held before filing of cases."

Political parties who ruled the country since the country's independence were afraid of public

opinion and that's why they tried to make sure that no public opinion is built against them, said Prof Serajul, also a political analyst.

He said if anyone is harmed by the media, the person can go to the Press Council for redress.

Journalists should take a united stand against curbing of press freedom, the DU teacher said, adding that political parties should also come forward to ensure freedom of press.

He said many owners of media outlets only try to ensure their business interests and that's why they don't speak against gagging of press freedom.

Suspend use of DSA immediately

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in Savar around 4:00am on Wednesday after being sued under the law. He was taken to Kashimpur Central Jail-1 from Dhaka Central Jail around 1:30pm yesterday.

Apart from Shams, Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman, an unnamed photographer, and unnamed others were accused in the case filed under the DSA.

The UN office mentioned that in February, a young man, Poritosh Sarkar, was sentenced to five years in prison under this law after being accused of hurting religious sentiments through a Facebook post.

"My Office has consistently raised concerns about the overly broad and ill-defined provisions of the Digital Security Act.

"The government has promised there will be safeguards against the arbitrary or excessive application of the law but that is not enough when arrests continue. The law itself needs a proper overhaul," read the statement.

The high commissioner called for the creation of an independent judicial panel to review all pending cases brought under the DSA with a view to those accused being released.

The UN rights office also said over 2,000 cases have been brought under the DSA, which came into force in October 2018.

Demanding immediate scrapping of the DSA, Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday said the law is a threat to independent and investigative journalism.

Repeated misuse of this act is an impediment to journalists discharging their professional responsibilities. Instead of going to the Press Council to seek redress for grievances over newspaper reports, most individuals are now filing lawsuits under the controversial act and harassing journalists, the DRU said in a press release.

Meanwhile, the US state department expressed deep concern over the Bangladesh government's use of the DSA.

During a question answer session, US state department's Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said, "So broadly, what I would say is we remain deeply concerned about the government's use of the Digital Security Act. And freedom of expression, including for members of the press, is an essential element

of democracy and is especially important in an election year.

"No members of the press should be threatened, harassed, physically attacked, or arrested for simply doing their job."

Besides, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in a statement published on its website, said, "Bangladesh authorities' harassment of staff members with the Prothom Alo newspaper and the arrest of correspondent Shamsuzzaman Shams under the draconian Digital Security Act are clear attempts to quash critical reporting."

CPJ Program Director Carlos Martinez de la Serna said, "Authorities must immediately release Shams and cease abusing the legal process against journalists, which produces a chilling effect on the media."

The Workers' Party of Bangladesh in a statement said the case against Prothom Alo journalists set another example of how the DSA is being used as a weapon of repression.

While posting a report written by Shams on social media on March 26, the Independence Day, Prothom Alo made a "card" with a quote of a labourer named Zakir Hossain. Though the card contained Zakir's quote, it had the photo of an adolescent boy taken from behind.

The mistake was noticed within 17 minutes, and the card was removed. Besides, corrections were made to the report and the news was again published online mentioning the corrections.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Jahangirnagar University students kept the Dhaka-Aricha highway blocked for almost an hour, demanding release of Shams and scrapping of the DSA.

Around 50 students marched through the campus in the afternoon before blocking the road.

Prothom Alo Bandhu Sabha Chattogram, a platform of readers of the paper, formed a human chain demanding withdrawal of the cases filed against the journalists.

People from different walks of life formed a human chain in Thakurgaon town where speakers said instead of arresting journalists, the government should take proper steps to address market manipulation that contributes to the rising prices of food.

Death toll in India temple collapse rises to 36

AFP, New Delhi

The death toll after a floor collapsed at a Hindu temple in India had risen to 36 yesterday after rescuers discovered the body of the last person still missing, police told AFP.

Dozens of worshippers celebrating a major religious holiday plunged into the stepwell -- a stair-lined communal water source -- on Thursday after the floor covering it collapsed in the central city of Indore. "Seventeen people were rescued yesterday. Thirty-six bodies have been recovered," senior police officer Manish Kapoor told AFP.

Women, children and an 18-month-old baby were among those standing on the grill covering the well when it buckled and gave way, plunging them into about 7.5 metres (25 feet) of water.

The bodies of dozens of victims were cremated on pyres near the scene of the accident yesterday after brief funeral rites.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Thursday he was "extremely pained" by news of the accident.

"My prayers with all those affected and their families," he added.

Modi's office said compensation payments of 200,000 rupees (\$2,400) would be given to the next of kin.

Narottam Mishra, home minister of Madhya Pradesh state, told reporters on Thursday that an investigation had been launched into the mishap.

56 journalists tortured, sued

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victim died by suicide afterwards.

The report was prepared based on information from nine daily newspapers, online news portals and ASK's own sources.

At least 105 persons also became victims of sexual assault over the last three months. Two were killed while protesting the assault incidents, the report said.

At least 353 children were either killed or tortured while 26 people died in different jails during the same period.

Two persons died in Rab and police custody while another one was killed in a shooting incident involving Rab during the same three months, read the report.