

Govt condemns disruption to girls' football matches

Authorities open probe into attack on venue in Joypurhat

STAR REPORT

The interim government yesterday condemned the actions of local hooligans who recently disrupted a girls' football match at Tilakpur High School ground in Joypurhat.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing in a statement ordered district administrations in Dinajpur and Joypurhat to take the necessary steps to reorganise the football match.

A local sports club had been organising a football tournament at the Tilakpur High School ground for over a month.

The friendly match between the two female teams from Joypurhat and Rangpur was supposed to take place before the final match of the tournament on Wednesday.

However, the match was called

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(L-R) Prof Selim Raihan, Prof Marufa Akter, Michael Kugelman, Shafqat Munir, Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, and Ramisa Rob, speak at a panel discussion on "Bangladesh at Geopolitical Crossroads" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. Story on page 1.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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regarding violations of relevant laws.

DIVISION AMONG JOURNALISTS
The realignments reflect the shifting allegiances of many media organisations in a country where journalism and politics have long been intertwined.

A significant segment of the journalist community here is starkly divided along political lines, and their biases often show in their reporting.

Also, some news outlets toe the official line out of fear or to gain undue benefits. Professionalism takes a back seat as they get busy disseminating government propaganda and reaping rewards along the way.

Journalist union leaders say the split emerged in 1992, after some pro-Awami League journalists waved black flags at the then prime minister Khaleda Zia at a journalist association event at the Jatiya Press Club.

This incident led to the formation of two factions within both the Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) and the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) – one leaning towards the AL and the other towards BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami.

Since then, partisan bias has been a common feature of reportage and editorial policies of many media houses.

Things were particularly grave during the 15-year rule of the Awami League. The media industry, with some notable exceptions, was dominated by business interests closely tied to the Hasina regime.

Many outlets saw their editorial independence erode, ultimately feeding the government's narrative and sometimes helping the government stifle dissent.

Allegations of corruption were rampant against some news leaders who blurred the lines between their professional roles and partisan interests.

Then there were the Digital Security Act and the Cyber Security Act that fostered an environment of fear and self-censorship among journalists.

Several media houses, including Amar Desh, Diganta TV, Channel One, Islamic TV, and Dainik Dinkal were closed down on various pretexts.

After the interim government took office, some advisers and organisers of the July uprising accused a section of the media of promoting the AL's narrative, which they argued enabled the Hasina government to be authoritarian.

They say some newspapers and TV channels blatantly supported the regime as it employed brutal measures to quell the movement, leaving hundreds killed and thousands injured.

'REEKS OF A PURGE'

The scenario has changed.

Now, journalists known to be of BNP and Jamaat stripes have taken on prominent positions, while many senior figures known to have been close to the AL regime have not only been sidelined but are also facing legal actions.

The widespread dismissals and appointments highlight the tendency of some media owners to adapt to changing political winds, according to industry insiders.

Not just senior journalists, many mid- to junior-level newsmen, especially in the television channels in Dhaka, lost their jobs during this period.

"It all reeks of a purge," a senior editor of a television station who was let go from his job told this newspaper.

While changes in government-run media houses like BSS and BTV are common with power shifts, what happened in privately owned media houses this time is unprecedented, he said.

"Dismissals, forced resignations, and changes within media houses on such a scale have never occurred under any government," said the journalist with over three and a half

Allegiance shifts, so do faces at the helm

decades of experience.

This paper could not log the exact number of journalists who lost jobs.

However, a survey by the Broadcast Journalists Centre, an organisation of TV and radio journalists, released on December 21 last year, reported that over 150 broadcast journalists lost their jobs in 2024.

"Most of them lost jobs after the August 5 changeover," one organiser involved with the survey told this newspaper.

The number of journalists who were shown the door would be much higher if the district correspondents of different TV channels and newspapers are taken into consideration.

After the fall of Hasina, at least 29 criminal cases were filed against 121 journalists in Dhaka, Chattogram, Bogura, and Rajshahi till November 17, according to this newspaper's compilation.

However, the actual number is likely higher, as The Daily Star has yet to gather information about cases from many other districts.

Some of these journalists were named in cases filed for crimes against humanity and genocide.

Besides, the information ministry revoked the accreditation cards of 167 journalists between October and November, citing four provisions of the Press Accreditation Policy but without giving any specific reason for each case.

After a fire incident at the Secretariat in December, the government suspended the accreditation cards of all journalists. It later said a new policy was being formulated for issuing the cards afresh.

Currently, journalists have limited access to the Secretariat.

The arbitrary filing of cases and cancellation of accreditation cards drew flak from journalist associations at home and abroad with many slamming it as a threat to press freedom.

Saiful Alam Chowdhury, associate professor of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, said, "In the past, there were pro-government journalists and there were some neutral journalists. But in the changed scenario, neutral journalists seem to remain silent in most cases for their survival."

During the AL rule, the media faced pressure from the state apparatus such as security agencies and even the Prime Minister's Office, as the government used them to spread propaganda, offering political and financial benefits to many, he added.

Speaking about the shake-ups, he said the change in the leadership in a media house influences the nature of its content.

He also said some media outlets are facing threats stemming from "mobocracy".

CHANGES IN NEWSPAPERS, ONLINE MEDIA

Editors of at least eight newspapers and one online news portal have been replaced since August 5.

Bhoror Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta has been in jail since September in connection with a murder case linked to the uprising. On January 21, the authorities of the daily pulled the plug on its print edition, citing "reasons beyond the owner's control".

Besides, two newspapers got new executive editors during this period.

In the latest incident, Saiful Alam, editor of Daily Jugantor, resigned from his post early this month. He was replaced by poet Abdul Hye Sikder.

Saiful now faces murder charges and his bank account is under investigation.

Sikder had worked for the Daily Inqilab, BSS and Amar Desh. He was at the helm of the BNP and Jamaat-leaning faction of the Dhaka Union of Journalists twice. He is also an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Mostafa Mamun, editor of Desh Rupantor, was replaced by Kamal Uddin Sabuj early this month.

Sabuj is a former president of the Jatiya Press Club. He contested and lost the press club election in December 2022 as president candidate from the BNP and Jamaat-backed panel.

Before joining Desh Rupantor, he worked at BSS as its senior news

charge as its acting editor from Kamlesh Roy in September last year.

Abul Kalam Azad, a director of Ha-Meem Group, took over as the acting editor of Samakal after the changeover, replacing Alamgir Hossain. Alamgir is facing a case linked to the uprising. His accreditation card was revoked and his bank account is under investigation.

Arun Kumar Dey, executive editor of Jai Jai Din, was replaced by Khurshed Alam, general secretary of BNP and Jamaat-backed faction of the Dhaka Union of Journalists, this month.

Daily Ittefaq too got a new executive editor, managing editor, and joint editor during this period.

Jewel Mazhar, editor of banglanews24.com, an online news portal, was replaced by Lutfor Rahman Himmel in November last year.

Sarabanga.net, another online news portal, has seen changes both in its ownership and news leadership.

Once owned by Gazi Group, Sarabanga is now owned by an internet service-providing company.

Golam Dastagir Gazi, who was the textile and jute minister of the Awami League government, is the founder and chairman of Gazi Group. He was arrested in late August last year from the city's Shantinagar area.

At least four newsmen, including Sarabanga's deputy editor Sandipan Basu, were either relieved or "forced to resign". Its Chief News Editor Rahman Mustafiz did not join work after the change in its ownership.

Golam Samdani Bhuiyan, a special correspondent of the news portal, also the president of Capital Market Journalists Forum, first took charge as chief reporter of the organisation after August changeover. Later, he was made head of news of the portal, sources said.

AK Azad, president of Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), said changes in leadership are internal affairs of a news organisation.

Noab did not receive any complaints of any newspaper being under pressure to make changes.

"We will stand by our members if we come to know they are being forced [to bring any changes]," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

CHANGES IN TELEVISION

The first major change in television channels took place in Ekattor Television. The authorities there dismissed its Head of News Shakil Ahmed and Special Correspondent Farzana Rupa on August 8.

The two were arrested at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka in late August, and have since been in jail in a murder case.

Mozammel Babu, managing director of Ekattor Television, was arrested in September. He has been in jail since then in a murder case.

The accreditation cards of all three journalists have been revoked. Their bank accounts are now under investigation.

The channel's special correspondent Shafique Ahmed, who covered the BNP beat for a long time, has taken charge as its chief operating officer and head of news.

"He is now leading the TV station," said one of the journalists from the channel.

The top leadership of Boishakhi TV was changed too. Its Head of News Ashok Chowdhury and Chief News Editor Saiful Islam were relieved of their duties.

Ziaul Kabir Suman, who worked for the now-defunct Diganta Television, was made the head of news, while Tawhidul Islam Shanto, who used to cover the BNP beat, became the CNE, according to two journalists of the station.

Three other news managers including a senior news editor were either relieved or forced to resign, they added.

Changes in leadership at Somoy TV have been much talked about.



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AK AZAD, president of Noab

editor. Earlier, he was at UNB.

Poet Hasan Hafiz became the editor of Kaler Kantha a few weeks after the ouster of Hasina. He had worked for Amar Desh, Boishakhi Television, Janakantha, and Dainik Bangla in different capacities.

Before him, Imdadul Haq Milan led the newspaper as its chief editor.

Hafiz was elected senior vice-president of the Jatiya Press Club in the last election from the BNP and Jamaat-backed panel. He took charge as the press club president immediately after the fall of the Hasina government.

Abu Taher, executive editor of Bangladesh Pratidin, was made acting editor of the newspaper in late August last year. He replaced Nayeem Nizam, a long-time editor of the newspaper.

Nizam's press accreditation card was revoked and his bank account is being investigated. He also stands accused in a murder case linked to the July-August uprising.

Ilias Uddin Khan, former general secretary of the Jatiya Press Club, has been appointed acting editor of Bhoror Akash, replacing Manoranjan Ghoshal.

Ilias contested the last press club election for the general secretary post from the BNP and Jamaat-backed panel but could not win.

Morsalin Babla, managing editor



While it is critical that those who were involved in commanding, aiding, and abetting the grave crimes committed during the [July] uprising are held to account, mass cases against journalists for not backing the protesters sends a dangerous message for freedom of expression under the interim government.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
says in its report published on January 28

of Protidiner Bangladesh, became the acting editor after Mustafiz Shafi left the paper early this month.

Syed Shahnewaz Karim, a senior journalist of Somoyer Alo, took

ACC to probe if 4 Gazipur bungalows belong to 'Rehana, family'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Corruption Commission has found four bungalows, including one named Tulip Territories, allegedly owned by the family of Sheikh Rehana in Gazipur.

The commission has launched an investigation to find out if the properties are really owned by Sheikh Rehana and her family members, according to multiple sources within the ACC.

Rehana's husband, Shafiq Ahmed Siddiq, and her brother-in-law, Tarique Siddiq, are also alleged to be owners of the properties, they said.

This development is a part of the ongoing ACC probe into the assets of Sheikh Rehana, her daughter Tulip Siddiq, and other relatives.

Confiscate S Alam's Tk 368cr properties Court orders authorities

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the confiscation of 58 acres of immovable properties worth Tk 368 crore belonging to S Alam Group Chairman Mohammed Saiful Alam and his family in connection with allegations of laundering Tk 368 crore.

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Full EU support for Yunus' reform agenda

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financial -- will be vital to the success of these reforms, and the EU should do what it can to support this process.

A good start would be expressions of public support for the Yunus administration's reform agenda, including in the form of high-level visits both to Bangladesh and Europe.

"The honeymoon period for Bangladesh's interim government is now well and truly over. The political challenges are likely to increase this year as political parties and other key players negotiate over reforms and jockey for electoral advantage," said Thomas Kean, ICG's senior consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The interim government is also under pressure over rising prices -- a legacy of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's mismanagement -- and it will be some time before the Bangladeshi people really see the benefits of ongoing efforts to get the economy back on track, he said.

"Backing the interim government's reforms will help restore the EU's image in Bangladesh, where it is perceived -- not entirely unfairly -- as having been overly supportive of the former government and focused mainly on its own economic interests," the report said.

European diplomats, some of whom publicly aligned with the Awami League regime, should broaden their engagement with the country's array of political forces, including student leaders and Islamist groups, which are now an inescapable part of the Bangladeshi political landscape.

"Aside from sending a clear message that they have moved on from the Hasina years, European capitals would gain greater insight into Bangladeshi politics, while enabling diplomats to encourage these political forces to keep supporting reforms as well as avoid inflammatory actions in the run-up to elections. After three flawed national elections, holding free, fair and peaceful polls will be paramount for restoring the Bangladeshi people's faith in electoral politics. Given the EU's expertise in this area, Brussels should send an observer mission to monitor the election."

No decision yet