

Russian attacks kill seven in Ukraine

REUTERS

Russian attacks killed a family of three late on Friday in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia and four more people in the country's north and east, officials said.

Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov said on social media the city had been struck more than 10 times, with a 14-year-old girl and her parents killed in the attacks and 12 people wounded, including an infant.

At the scene, rescue teams sifted through piles of debris amid the din of a buzzsaw, and could be seen carrying away at least one body.

"Russian terrorism continues to destroy families all over Ukraine," First Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko wrote on X on Saturday in response to the attack.

Prosecutors in the northeastern Sumy region said late on Friday that Russian forces dropped at least six guided bombs on the village of Krasnopillia, killing two people and injuring at least two.



Media Reform Commission Chairman Kamal Ahmed, along with other members, handing over their report to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Special law proposed to shield journos

FROM PAGE 1

"We hope that the interim government and the future elected government will implement these recommendations," he said.

Prof Yunus said, "We want to swiftly implement the reform proposals that can be completed now. For that, I would like the reform commissions to promptly present the recommendations that can be quickly implemented."

Despite the presence of constitutional guarantees, institutions, and laws, media freedom in Bangladesh has not been ensured due to inadequate law enforcement and institutional inefficiency, according to the 12-member Media Reform Commission, which was formed on November 18 last year.

A significant portion of the media has become biased as a result of investments by political and business interests, leading to a decline in public trust and overall media credibility, according to the commission report. The report emphasised that responsible media is indispensable for establishing democracy and a pluralistic society.

To improve media standards, the commission recommended strengthening the role of supervisory institutions and developing an internal accountability system within the media.

"Political will, from political parties and institutions, including the ruling government, is needed to uphold the constitutional and civil rights to freedom of expression and free access to information," the report said.

OWNERSHIP

Kamal said that the media did not reach its current state overnight. It is the result of long-term changes and practices that have severely impacted the independence of journalism.

"We have observed that a major issue in Bangladesh is the infiltration of black money into the media industry. Additionally, the problems in media ownership have become a significant challenge," he said.

Against this backdrop, the commission proposed that medium and large media companies issue shares to the public and be listed on the stock exchange.

It also said that founding directors, individuals, institutions, companies, or family members should not be able to have more than 25 percent of the shares. Employees should get 5 percent of the shares.

The commission recommended an ordinance to ban cross-platform ownership, where the owner of a television channel cannot own a newspaper, or vice versa.

It said such ownership is prohibited in the US. In the UK, a law prohibits the owner of a television channel from holding more than 20 percent of shares in a local newspaper. In India, a bill on this issue is awaiting parliamentary debate.

The commission recommended a "one house, one media" policy, where no single company, group, individual, family, or entrepreneur should own multiple media outlets.

"Measures must be taken to ensure transparency in media ownership so that people can make informed choices. Additionally, this will discourage the infiltration of black money into the media", said the

report.

SEPARATE REGULATOR

The reform commission recommended the formation of an independent "Bangladesh Media Commission" replacing the Press Council and a Broadcasting Commission. This will bring all types of media under the supervision of a single institution, and ensure accountability and freedom of press.

The Bangladesh Media Commission, as a regulatory body, will determine the qualifications and disqualifications of publishers and editors to ensure that those convicted of criminal offences or loan defaulters cannot become owners/editors of media outlets.

This commission will set graduation as the minimum educational qualification for journalists, develop a code of conduct for them and ensure its implementation.

It will recommend licences for broadcasting media (TV and radio) and online portals, and ensure compliance with their terms.

The commission will provide redress for complaints from individuals, institutions, or groups harmed by false or motivated news.

PROTECT JOURNALISTS

Besides a separate law to ensure the safety of journalists, the reform commission recommended reviewing cases against journalists under the Penal Code, Information and Communication Technology Act, Digital Security Act, Cyber Security Act, and Contempt of Court Act.

Based on the review, appropriate steps must be taken for the submission of final reports by the police or the withdrawal of cases by the relevant government prosecutors, the commission said in its report.

All criminal defamation laws, like in sections 499, 500, 501, and 502 of the Penal Code, 1860, and section 29 of the Cyber Security Act, 2023, should be repealed, the report said.

It said the provisions of the proposed Cyber Security Ordinance that have raised concerns among journalists and rights activists, and section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, should be amended to emphasise national security and include legal protections for investigative journalism.

WAGES

The commission recommended that the minimum entry-level salary for journalists be aligned with that of Grade 9 officers in the Bangladesh Civil Service.

Since the cost of living in Dhaka is high, a "Dhaka allowance" may be added to the salaries of journalists staying in the capital, Kamal said.

Journalists outside Dhaka should be promoted to staff correspondent after working as a correspondent (retainer) for three years.

OTHER PROPOSALS

Currently, newspaper circulation is considered for enlistment on the government's media list.

The reform commission proposed that circulation be replaced by number of copies sold as the criterion for enlistment.

It said the advertisement rate for newspapers, which had not raised for a decade, should be increased now and then annually in line with inflation. Government and autonomous

organisations should also promptly pay the dues owed to newspapers for published advertisements.

Customs duties on newsprint imports for the newspaper industry should be reconsidered, the report said.

The circulation numbers of English newspapers should not be compared with Bangla newspapers when determining government advertisement rates, according to the reform commission. Therefore, the maximum and minimum advertisement rates for

English newspapers need to be rationalised.

Arrangements should be made for easy-term, low-interest loans for the media, the commission added.

Additionally, it said a review of applications for private TV station licences shows that the process was not transparent or competitive. The issuance of these licences was primarily based on political considerations and, to some extent, business connections.

The government's policy has a provision that TV station licences will be issued for an initial period of five years and renewed after reviewing their proper operations. "In this context, all licences issued over the past decade and a half need to be reviewed," said the reform commission.

It also recommended having an acceptable and reasonable television rating point (TRP) system. Fees must be paid for the broadcast of government announcements and advertisements on television.

The government should direct cable operators to complete digitisation within one year so that television channels can generate revenue.

The decline in radio listeners and the dramatic drop in advertising revenue have put FM radio broadcasting in an existential crisis.

The security deposit kept by the government against radio station licences should be returned, and the provision for keeping a security deposit, along with the annual renewal system, should be abolished. Arrangements should be made to allocate government advertisements to FM radio as well.

The reform commission said the policy for online news portal registration should be updated and the registration should be done by the proposed media commission.

It said since the registrations granted to online portals over the past decade were not based on any transparent and specific policy, but through the arbitrary exercise of government power, they need to be reviewed.

The annual renewal system for online portals after registration should be abolished and government advertisements on online portals should be allocated based on specific policies, ensuring transparency and fairness.

Kamal said the reform commission proposed the establishment of an independent Jatiya Samprachar Sanghstha, merging state-run BTV, Bangladesh Betar, and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha.

BSS can play the role of the Jatiya Samprachar Sanghstha's news section, he said.

FROM PAGE 1

impose an outright ban on the party, it said.

BNP leaders maintain that such decisions should be left to the people rather than being enforced through a government directive or political manoeuvring.

The party's standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "We cannot back any action that undermines national stability and unity. Politics should remain in the hands of politicians and must be conducted in the interest of the nation."

He also said the BNP believes the AL must face trial for genocide and crimes against humanity under article 47 of the constitution, which allows amendments to the International Crimes Tribunal Act.

"The court should decide whether the Awami League can continue participating in elections and political activities,"

At the same time, Salahuddin slammed the government for initially considering legal amendments to prosecute the AL as a party, only to backtrack later.

"Instead, the government opted to suppress the party's political activities using police force."

He said the people of Bangladesh had rejected AL's "fascist politics" through the July uprising. He accused the party of failing to show repentance or seek forgiveness for their crimes.

Stressing their party's commitment to a multiparty democracy and inclusivity, BNP leaders said endorsing a move to ban a party contradicts its core values. They

further warned that creating political turmoil and involving the military in such matters could destabilise the country ahead of the December election.

Speaking to this newspaper, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "It [the demand for a ban on the AL] is an attempt to create an anarchic situation in the country and ultimately delay the electoral process."

"By making such statements [like the army exerting pressure to bring the AL back], certain groups are trying to make the patriotic armed forces controversial and pit them against the people for an ulterior political motive ... It's very dangerous for the country's sovereignty and independence, which we can't support," he added.

BNP leaders accused the NCP of attempting to pressurise the interim government by manufacturing political crises, one after another. The party believes taking such action (banning AL) through an executive order would set a bad precedent.

While BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman did not directly address the issue, he urged the interim government to avoid actions that might allow fugitive allies of the previous regime to regain influence in politics.

Virtually addressing an iftar event on Friday, he said doubts and suspicions have arisen in politics as minor issues are being turned into major ones, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

He stressed the need to prioritise the national election over local government

Some proposals may weaken future govts

FROM PAGE 1

conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday.

The party will submit its opinions on key recommendations to the National Consensus Commission today.

Earlier, its standing committee met on Thursday to discuss the matters.

Reading from a statement at the press conference, Fakhrul said, "The state of the National Consensus Commission's spreadsheet, along with various statements from commission members and certain political parties, raises questions about whether these recommendations are part of a pre-planned initiative, making it difficult to determine if they truly serve the interests of democracy."

Referring to the recommendations of the constitution and electoral reform commissions, the party observed it is "evident that there is an unjustifiable attempt to appoint unelected individuals to state positions, which is unwarranted".

Fakhrul criticised the recommendation to establish new commissions, including a National Constitutional Council, arguing that the descriptions of these commissions' jurisdictions and functions indicate a clear intention to undermine and limit the powers of the executive and legislative branches as much as possible.

Alleging that certain interim

"This will ultimately result in a weak and ineffective government system."

He also raised concerns regarding the consensus commission's spreadsheet.

"Instead of presenting the proposals directly, they are framed as leading questions. For example, the spreadsheet asks, 'Do you support implementing the proposals through a constituent assembly? Answer yes or no.' But the question of whether or not we agree on the concept of a constituent assembly should come first."

Fakhrul also noted that while the constitution reform commission's recommendations include crucial constitutional matters, such as the "preamble", these were not mentioned in the consensus commission's spreadsheet.

"While around 70 proposals are mentioned in the spreadsheet, the main report contains nearly 123 recommendations. Similarly, the electoral reform commission's main report has about 150 recommendations, but the spreadsheet lists only 27, most of which are related to constitutional reforms."

"Therefore, we believe that attaching our opinions on the main recommendations [on the spreadsheet] will help avoid confusion."

Alleging that certain interim

JCD leader killed in clash over school committee

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

A leader of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was killed and at least 10 others were injured during a clash between two groups over the formation of a school committee in Kishoreganj's Katiadi upazila yesterday.

Two people have been detained in connection with the incident, said Toffajjal Hossain, additional superintendent of police (Hossainpur Circle) in Kishoreganj.

The incident took place at Chatal Baghatta School and College in Mumurdia union of the upazila.

The deceased, Ashik Khan, 24, was the joint convener of the JCD's Mumurdia union unit.

Locals said that a violent altercation broke out between the supporters of Nuruzzaman Chandan, the joint secretary of the JCD Central Committee, and Assistant Attorney General Ashikuzzaman Nazrul over the formation of the school's ad-hoc committee yesterday afternoon.

The clash left at least 10 people, including the school's acting headmaster, injured.

The injured were taken to a hospital, where Ashik died from his injuries while undergoing treatment.

Addl SP Toffajjal Hossain said that two of the injured are in critical condition.

"Two individuals have been detained for their suspected involvement in the incident. Further legal actions will be taken based on the complaints from the deceased's family."

Bodies of four Rohingyas found, 25 rescued

FROM PAGE 12

near the shore immediately joined local fishermen in a rescue operation, successfully saving 25 people, he said.

Although the sunken boat was later recovered, neither the missing BGB member nor any other individuals could be found, he added.

"The rescue operation was still ongoing," Ashiqur Rahman told this newspaper around 5:30pm.

Meanwhile, Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sheikh Ehsan Uddin said he had heard from locals that four bodies were recovered from the sea after the boat capsizing incident.

"But I don't know any other details."

Local fishermen who participated in the rescue operation alongside the BGB said that after speaking to survivors, they came to know that some 40 to 50 people were on board when the boat capsized.

you crystallise and coalesce everybody around that July Charter, and make sure that that itself is used as a guide to shape the reform initiatives going forward."

Asked how reconciliation among the political parties is possible, Ero said one has to deal with the roots of a conflict.

"Otherwise it festers, while grievances build up onto another day as well. And there are lots of historical issues. You can't settle them all before the elections as well. But it's important that you know each side tries to extend your hand to the others."

The political rivalry in Bangladesh is too deep and entrenched, she said.

"But surely, the lesson from last year's violent tragedy is that if you don't address these fundamental issues, you lay the ground for further and probably worse violence. So this is why Bangladesh has an opportunity out of last year's tragedy, out of this national consensus reform initiative, to begin to address some of those."

Accountability of those who committed crimes and human rights violations needs to be ensured, but the justice process needs to be impartial, transparent and just, she said.

"If it's seen as vengeance, then you stoke the fire for another crisis as well. So those fundamental principles are called to the country's stability as well."

The Rohingya crisis, meanwhile, became complicated with the decline in

funding, conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA) in the Rakhine State and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army's (ARSA) role in Rakhine.

There's no active conflict in the area where the Rohingya come from, but there is a military blockade that is preventing goods from getting into the area, she said, adding that there is no electricity or internet.

She said they are concerned about the attacks by the Rohingya armed groups in Northern Rakhine, and it is not conducive for good relations between the AA and Bangladesh and even improving communal ties between the AA and Rohingya civilians.

"On the ground, Rohingya civilians will be the ones that suffer as a result of these attacks."

Asked about Bangladesh's possible engagement with the AA, she said given the changing realities and border security along Myanmar, the neighbouring countries need to rethink their own strategy.

"It's a security risk as well. So, you can't afford to not engage with that reality on the border, and that's why I think we welcome this engagement. We are saying, for the sake of your own national security, there is a need to rethink about how you engage if the long-term goal is to ensure the repair, safe repatriation of the Rohingyas back to Rakhine."