



CYBERSECURITY LAW 9 contentious sections shed

Advisory council approves ordinance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The advisory council of the interim government yesterday approved the Cyber Security Ordinance, which makes online abuse punishable and recognises internet access as citizens' right.

The ordinance also drops nine sections of the cybersecurity act that criminalised criticism, misinformation, and defamatory content related to the Liberation War, spirit of the Liberation War, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, national anthem, and the national flag.

The ordinance was approved at an advisory council meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

A draft law on redrawing boundaries of electoral constituencies were also approved at the meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul said the nine sections dropped from the Cyber Security Act had been widely criticised over the years. Most of the cases filed under the act were based on those sections.

All the cases that were previously filed under the now-repealed sections of the cybersecurity act will be automatically dismissed, said Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul.

All the cases filed under the now-repealed sections will also be automatically dismissed, he added.

Many journalists had suffered after they were sued under those sections, Prof Asif said.

The sections concerning offences and penalties related to the deterioration of law and order, as well as the transmission or publication of offensive, false, or threatening information and data, have also been abolished.

The law will criminalise the publication and threats to publish sexually exploitative content targeting women and children online, as well as content that incites violence through "religious hatred", the law adviser said.

The ordinance clearly defines "religious hatred" to prevent any possible misinterpretations and harassment of citizens, he said.

When a case is filed over the aforesaid crimes, the complaint must be submitted before a court. If the judge finds that the case lacks merit, they will have the authority to dismiss the case at the pre-trial stage.

"Under the proposed Cyber Security Ordinance, for the first time, online abuse and sexual harassment of women and children have been recognised as punishable offences."

Some cases can be settled out-of-court and those accused of committing such crimes may get bail, he said.

Cybercrimes committed using artificial intelligence (AI) will be punishable, Prof Asif added.

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Thousands of elated BNP activists walk alongside the vehicle carrying their party Chairperson Khaleda Zia to her Gulshan residence from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday. Many of them came from outside the capital early in the day to welcome their leader back home from London.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Govt declares 10-day Eid holiday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Eid-ul-Azha holidays will begin on June 5 and continue until June 14, offering a 10-day break for public servants across the country.

The decision was made at the advisory council meeting held at the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday meeting.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam made the decision public through Facebook.

To compensate for the extended holidays, all government offices will remain open on two prior Saturdays -- May 17 and May 24 -- which are typically weekly holidays.

Government employees enjoyed a 9-day Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, including weekends, this year.

Khaleda comes home, lights up BNP

Thousands line Dhaka streets to give former PM a warm welcome; Zubaida Rahman returns after 17yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khaleda Zia has returned -- healed and ready to get back into the political fray.

The BNP chairperson, who had been imprisoned in 2018 and later released under conditions of house arrest, has returned to Bangladesh after receiving advanced medical treatment in London.

Plagued by myriad complications since her incarceration, Khaleda's health had become a major political talking point.

At 79, she was finally released from house arrest last year following the fall of the Hasina-led AL regime and flew to London for treatment on January 7 this year.

Thousands of BNP leaders and activists lined the road from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Gulshan from early morning to welcome her -- a reflection of her symbolic return to the re-energised party.

The VIP Road was clogged with buses, vans and minibuses. Party activists carried flags,

The day is not far off when our acting chairman [Tarique] will lead the democratic movement from this country, not from Britain. The right conditions may emerge within days, and he will return.

-- BNP Standing Committee member AZM Zahid Hossain

banners, festoons, placards and flowers -- revelling to festive music played by a live band. Many wore headbands or T-shirts bearing Khaleda's image.

Notably, for the first time, banners also featured the face of Zubaida Rahman, wife of acting BNP chairman Tarique Rahman.

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UN experts concerned over journo arrests

Write to govt, calling for reviewing cases

PORIMOL PALMA

Three UN independent experts have written a letter to Bangladesh expressing serious concerns about reports that more than 140 journalists, including journalist couple Farzana Rupa and Shakil Ahmed, have been accused of murder of protestors during the July uprising.

The letter was sent by Irene Khan, special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Ganna Yudkivska, vice chair on communications of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; and Margaret Satterthwaite, special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, to Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain.

They sought to know the factual and legal grounds for the arrest, detention and prosecution of the journalists

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Hefazat regrets offensive language at May 3 rally

Warns people against labelling Islamists 'militant', 'communal'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam has expressed regret over the use of unexpected and offensive language by two speakers at its May 3 grand rally at Suhrawardy Udyan.

In an official statement to the media yesterday, Hefazat's Joint Secretary General, Azizul Haque Islamabadi, said the two speakers in question unexpectedly used offensive rhetoric, which Hefazat finds undesirable and does not approve of.

"We do not endorse the use of inappropriate language at the grand rally. We offer our sincere regret to those who were hurt.

"At the same time, we call upon those from the so-called 'secular-progressive camp' who constantly mock Islamic scholars and clerics with hateful labels like

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A bus dropped off this schoolboy, his mother, and another person in the middle of Airport Road near Nikunja. The person is seen pulling the boy away from the path of a motorbike. The bike missed the boy by a whisker. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

NCP for electoral college for electing president

Disagrees on provincial govts during talks with consensus commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party has agreed to the National Consensus Commission's proposals to establish an electoral college system to elect the president, introduce a bicameral parliament, and allow lawmakers the liberty to vote against their party on all matters except budget bills and no-confidence motions in parliament.

The party was also in favour of officially declaring Cumilla and Faridpur as new administrative divisions.

These views came as part of the NCP's detailed outline for state reform, which the party submitted to the NCC during a dialogue held yesterday morning at the LD Hall of the national parliament.

Speaking to reporters during a break in the meeting, NCP Joint Convenor Sarwar Tusher shared the party's positions on various reform proposals.

Tusher said the NCP has called for measures to prevent any individual or political party from taking control of the entire governance system.

The party has also proposed

lowering the voting age to 16 and setting the minimum age for parliamentary candidates at 23. Currently, citizens can become voters at 18, and the minimum age to contest parliamentary elections is 25.

The NCP disagreed with the proposal to establish provincial governments and recommended strengthening local government institutions.

He said the party recommended that elected officials from city corporations and other local government bodies be incorporated

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