



UNBOWED

Mobs vandalise, torch The Daily Star, Prothom Alo offices in nightlong mayhem; 28 Star journos rescued after being trapped for hours on rooftop



The first two floors of The Daily Star in flames early yesterday. A mob first vandalised the office, then set fire to it and obstructed the rescue of newspaper employees trapped inside, and looted valuables.

PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a vicious assault on press freedom, mobs launched coordinated attacks on the head offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka early yesterday and vandalised the offices, looted valuables, set the buildings ablaze, and trapped journalists and staff of the English daily inside for hours.

At The Daily Star's office on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, they forced their way into the building around midnight and unleashed vandalism and looting.

They smashed furniture and glass doors, destroyed office equipment, tore down posters of July uprising martyrs Abu Sayed and Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho, and set fire to the ground and first floors where photographs of the uprising were on display.

Furniture and stacks of newspapers were set alight on the ground floor, with the blaze spreading up to the second floor. Another group dragged furniture onto the road in front of the building and burned it there.

The attackers entered the first through sixth floors, smashing computers and furniture and looting electronic equipment, including computers, cameras and hard drives. Food items from the office canteen were also taken.

As the fire intensified, flames and thick black smoke choked corridors and stairwells. At least 28 journalists and staff fled upward and took shelter on the rooftop, but breathing there also became increasingly difficult.

"I can't breathe anymore. There's too much smoke. I'm inside. You are killing me," investigative journalist Zyma Islam posted on Facebook around 1:00am.

Outside, friends, families and colleagues of those trapped waited in anguish. "Are they safe? When will they come out? When will they be rescued?" asked one relative.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

A dark day for independent journalism

They can burn our office, not our resolve

It was one of the darkest days for independent journalism in Bangladesh when two of its largest newspapers — The Daily Star and Prothom Alo — were attacked.

Our colleagues, trapped on the roof, feared for their lives as a mob vandalised one floor after another and set fire to the lower floors. Although at one point it became difficult for them to breathe because of the smoke, no one has been hurt and everyone has returned home safe thanks to the efforts of the fire service, police and army.

Earlier, alarmed by the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Unite against all kinds of mob violence: Govt

We're with you, CA tells Star, Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has urged the people of the country to resist all forms of mob violence committed by a few fringe elements.

"We strongly and unequivocally condemn all acts of violence, intimidation, arson, and destruction of property," said a statement issued by the chief adviser's press wing yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



Osman Hadi brought home, funeral today

Janaza at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at 2:00pm; nation erupts in protests for justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho and one of the frontliners of the July uprising, reached the country yesterday.

A Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight carrying his coffin landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 5:48pm.

Hadi's brother-in-law, Amirul Islam, and Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber received his body at the airport.

An MP aspirant from Dhaka-8, Hadi, sustained a critical head injury on December 12 after being shot by assailants in the capital's Paltan area.

After receiving initial treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Evercare Hospital, he was airlifted to Singapore on December 15 for advanced medical care.

He passed away at Singapore General Hospital on Thursday night.

As per official instructions, Hadi's body was taken to the mortuary of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, to be kept overnight, said hospital Director Prof Abdul Wadud Chowdhury.

From the mortuary, his body will be taken to his funeral today, Prof Abdul told this newspaper last night. Hadi's namaz-e-janaza will be held at 2:00pm today at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Chief Adviser's Press Wing made the announcement and requested attendees not to carry bags or heavy items.

Flying drones in and around the parliament complex will remain strictly prohibited during the programme.

Inqilab Moncho, in a Facebook post, said in line with the family's wishes, Hadi will be buried beside the grave of poet Kazi Nazrul Islam near the Dhaka University Central Mosque.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, in his address to the nation on Thursday following the death of Hadi, announced today a day of state mourning.

Hadi, born in Jhalakathi and a prominent leader of last year's July uprising, was 32.

PROTESTS ERUPT NATIONWIDE

Hadi's death sparked protests in the capital and other parts of the country

on Thursday night, with demonstrators demanding the immediate arrest of the culprits.

Following Hadi's death, Dhaka University students brought out mourning processions from TSC and residential halls around 10:30pm on Thursday.

At Shahbagh, former adviser Asif Mahmud arrived at 11:30pm, followed by National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam at 11:45pm.

Nahid led slogans against Indian aggression and the Awami League, saying Hadi's sacrifice would inspire countless others.

The protests continued overnight and into yesterday, with Shahbagh emerging as the centre of demonstrations. Crowds grew steadily as the day progressed, drawing people from different walks of life.

After Juma prayers yesterday, protesters joined the gathering in small processions from Dhaka University, Baitul Mukarram National Mosque and several nearby mosques. A section of the demonstrators also performed Juma prayers under the open sky at Shahbagh.

By midday, the Shahbagh intersection was sealed off, halting all public transport movement. Students and members of the public occupied the crossing, chanting slogans in two groups. School and college students were also seen among the protesters.

In the afternoon, a protest rally was held at Shahbagh, where Ducusu Vice-President Shadik Kayem announced that Shahbagh would henceforth be known as "Shaheed Osman Hadi Chhattr".

"We will not return home until the killers of Osman Hadi are brought to justice," Shadik said, calling on all anti-fascist forces to unite.

In Chattogram, separate protest marches, token coffin processions and rallies were held after Juma prayers at different points of the city.

Meanwhile, Islami Chhatra Shibir's Chattogram city unit brought out a protest march and held a rally after Juma prayers at the Jamiatul Falah Mosque premises.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

UN, int'l rights groups condemn attack on media

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations, diplomatic missions and international rights organisations have condemned the attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo and the violence that erupted following the death of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi on Thursday.

They said such acts of violence and intimidation, that strike at the heart of press freedom and the public's right to be informed, are unacceptable.

They called for swift and impartial investigations and holding to account those responsible.

The offices of the two leading media houses came under attack, arson, vandalism and looting early yesterday. New Age Editor Nurul Kabir, also president of Editors' Council, was also harassed while going to visit the journalists stuck amid fire at The Daily Star office.

In a statement from Geneva, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk called everyone to remain calm and to refrain from violence.

Mentioning that he was deeply troubled by the killing of Hadi, Türk urged the authorities to conduct a prompt, impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the attack that led to Hadi's death, and to ensure due process and accountability for those responsible.

"Retaliation and revenge will only deepen divisions and undermine the rights of all," he added.

Several protests erupted at different locations across the country after Hadi's death was announced on Thursday, six days after he was shot.



Leaders of political parties and others receive the body of July frontliner Sharif Osman Hadi at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday evening after it reached Bangladesh from Singapore.

PHOTO: STAR

The attacks reflect state's negligence

Say Editors' Council and Noab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Editors' Council and the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) have expressed deep concern, anger, and strong condemnation over the attacks, vandalism, and arson at the offices of leading dailies Prothom Alo and The Daily Star.

"This attack is not just on the media; it is an attack on our society and democratic values. Above all, it is an attack on Bangladesh," read a statement signed by Editors' Council President Nurul Kabir and Noab President AK Azad yesterday.

During the late-night assault on Thursday, in addition to significant damage to the infrastructure and assets of the two institutions, the lives of journalists were put at risk.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5