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An attempt to derail polls

Parties condemn attack on Star, Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Major political parties yesterday condemned the attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, describing the violence as a threat to democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, and an attempt to derail the upcoming national election.

Condemning the nationwide violence, vandalism and arson following the death of Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir warned that a certain quarter was deliberately pushing the country towards anarchy.

"This group is conspiring to jeopardise the process of democratic transition," he said after an emergency Standing Committee meeting at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

Some leaders at the meeting expressed concern that a faction within the government might be allowing those responsible for the attacks.

"They have put the lives of working journalists at risk. Nurul Kabir, the editor of New Age and a prominent figure in the anti-fascism July movement and all democratic movements in the country, was attacked. Cultural institutions such as Chhayanaut were also targeted. We strongly condemn and express our disgust at these hateful acts," Fakhrul added.

He said there was no alternative but for all political and social forces opposed to anarchy to unite and resist the conspiracy.

Referring to the upcoming polls and the expected return of Tarique Rahman on December 25, party leaders warned that the violence was part of a planned effort to disrupt both processes. They cautioned that failure to maintain law and order could further threaten the election.

Earlier, responding to journalists, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed also termed the attacks as a ploy to obstruct the polls.

"The government should have anticipated this. There should have been intelligence reports. Preventive measures should have been taken earlier."

Jamaat-e-Islami termed the attack on the media an attack on democratic practice, freedom of expression and the rule of law, though it did not name any media outlet.

In a statement, the party said the anger and emotion among students and the public were "understandable" after the martyrdom of Hadi, who died at a Singapore hospital on Thursday night, six days after being shot in Dhaka.

"But if any group tries to use this anger for their own interests, it cannot be accepted," it said.

The National Citizen Party-led Gonotantrik Songskar Jote said the attacks were carried out by those seeking to derail the polls.

In a separate statement, the NCP said, "Hidden collaborators inside the country want to create extreme chaos. They want to create a situation like a civil war."

Addressing a protest march in Shahbagh earlier, NCP Convenor Nahid Islam said those who attacked and set fire to Prothom Alo and The Daily Star did not support Hadi. Claiming the incident was "planned internationally" to divert the issue and create division, he urged the government to identify and arrest those involved.

In a statement, the Biplobi Workers Party of Bangladesh blamed the government for the attacks and demanded the immediate arrest and trial of those involved in setting fire to Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Chhayanaut and other institutions.

Ganosamhati Andolon demanded the resignation of Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury for failing to ensure the security of media organisations.

The National Democratic Front said the attacks posed an obstacle to freedom of expression, alleging that under the guise of protest, vested groups attacked media offices, assaulted Nurul Kabir, targeted the Chhayanaut building and "severely damaged the country's image".

Islami Andolon Bangladesh Joint Secretary General and party spokesperson Maulana Gazi Ataur Rahman said, "No matter what the situation is, setting fire to media offices can never be an acceptable form of protest."

A faction of the Jatiya Party and the National Democratic Front also strongly condemned the attacks on The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and New Age editor Nurul Kabir.

Mob kills man over 'hurting religious sentiments'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A garment worker was beaten to death by a mob in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila on Thursday night over allegations of "hurting religious sentiments".

The victim, Dipu Chandra Das, 27, of the district's Tarakanda upazila, was an employee of Pioneer Knitwears, police said.

Abdullah Al Mamun, additional superintendent (admin and finance) of police Mymensingh, said a factory official told the Bhaluka police that a group of workers started beating up Dipu inside the factory over allegations of "derogatory remarks about holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)" around 8:00pm.

Factory sources said the attackers took Dipu out of the factory and locals also joined them, killing him on the spot. They also set the body on fire, leaving it partially burnt.

Police later recovered the body and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

SEEPAGE 7 COL 4



Polyethylene bags washed in the Buriganga are left to dry on the bank so that they can be recycled. Even though the government has banned the use of such bags, they are widely available. Most bags end up polluting the soil for years.

PHOTO: STAR

Nurul Kabir harassed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age and president of the Editors' Council, was harassed in front of The Daily Star office near Farmgate in Dhaka early yesterday.

The incident occurred after Kabir went to the site in response to reports of attacks, vandalism and looting at the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo on Thursday night, which continued into early yesterday.

A video circulating on social media shows a mob holding Kabir by the hair and pushing him as he approached The Daily Star office, which had been vandalised and set on fire. At one point, he fell onto the street.

Law enforcement officials and army personnel deployed in the area to maintain law and order later rescued Kabir and escorted him to safety inside The Daily Star office.

"I came here as president of the Editors' Council, and I thought

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No compromise on Ukraine: Putin Says EU's 'daylight robbery' of Russian assets failed

REUTERS, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin offered no compromise on his terms for ending the war in Ukraine yesterday and accused the European Union of attempting "daylight robbery" of Russian assets.

Putin set out the Kremlin's stance on the war in the opening moments of his annual end-of-year press conference, a marathon event that typically runs for some four hours.

He said he did not see readiness on the Ukrainian side to agree a peace deal, but there were "certain signals" it was willing to engage in dialogue.

"The only thing I want to say is that we have always said this: we are ready and willing to end this conflict peacefully, based on the principles I outlined last June at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and by addressing the root causes that led to this crisis," Putin said.

He was referring to a speech 18 months ago in which he demanded that Ukraine abandon its ambition of joining the Nato military alliance and withdraw entirely from four regions that Russia has claimed as its own territory. Kyiv refuses to give up land that Moscow's forces have

failed to capture in nearly four years of war.

Putin was speaking hours after European Union leaders set aside a plan to use frozen Russian assets as backing for a loan to Ukraine, deciding instead to borrow cash to help fund Kyiv's defence against

Putin said the bloc had backed away from the original scheme because it would have faced serious repercussions, and it had damaged its status as a safe place to store assets.

Russia for the next two years.

The EU leaders said they reserved the right to use Russian assets to repay the loan if Moscow fails to pay war reparations to Ukraine.

Putin said the bloc had backed away from the original scheme because it would have faced serious repercussions, and it had damaged its status as a safe place to store assets.

"Theft is not the appropriate term... It's daylight robbery. Why

can't this robbery be carried out? Because the consequences could be grave for the robbers," he said.

"This isn't just a blow to their image; it's an undermining of trust in the euro zone, and the fact that many countries, not just Russia, but primarily oil producing countries, store their gold and foreign exchange reserves in the euro zone."

After nearly four years, the war stands at a delicate juncture as US President Donald Trump pushes for a peace deal on terms that Ukraine and its European allies fear will be slanted towards Russia.

Russia says it is waiting to hear from Washington how its draft peace proposals have been modified following consultations between the United States, Ukraine and the Europeans.

The state of the conflict - and the question of when it will end - dominated the first phase of the "Direct Line" event, which Putin has held in different formats most years since 2001.

He typically uses it to field dozens of questions on everything from nuclear weapons to the price of eggs. Some are posed by journalists and others by ordinary Russians, who can submit them online or by phone.

Attacks on media outlets, cultural orgs spark outrage

Journalists, rights bodies, civil society protest violence

STAR REPORT

Journalist organisations, rights bodies, cultural groups and members of civil society yesterday strongly condemned the attacks, arson and looting at the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, and the vandalism of cultural organisation Chhayanaut, saying they were a direct assault on press freedom and the public's right to information.

They also demanded that those responsible be identified and brought to justice.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the aggressive and vengeful conduct of some forces, claiming victory after the fall of authoritarian rule, is giving rise to new forms of repression. "The direct victims of this are free media, dissent, and freedom of expression... The government has failed to take effective measures to confront or prevent such situations."

He added that vandalism and arson attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, the harassment of New Age editor Nurul Kabir, the attack on Chhayanaut, and the lynching of Dipu Chandra Das, followed by the burning of his body on allegations of hurting religious sentiments, must not be treated as isolated incidents.

The Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) described the attacks as "planned disinformation and hate campaigns". In a statement, it said these campaigns, following the death of July frontliner Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho, incited unlawful attacks, vandalism and arson targeting media and cultural institutions.

BLAST demanded prompt and independent investigations into all incidents linked to Hadi's killing and the subsequent violence.

Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigosthi, whose office was also attacked with arson yesterday, linked the violence to attempts to exploit Hadi's death. In a statement, it said dark reactionary forces are conspiring to turn Bangladesh into a failed state, adding that the targeting of media and cultural institutions, despite having no connection to Hadi's death, shows the attackers did not want peace, security or democratic order to return to the country.

Dhaka Union of Journalists said attacks on media offices can never be justified. They also condemned the attack on Nurul Kabir and the killing of Khulna PROTEST

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People protest the murder of July frontliner Sharif Osman Hadi at the Shahbagh intersection in the capital yesterday. Hadi was shot on December 12 and he died on Thursday in Singapore while receiving treatment there.

PHOTO: STAR

Announcement

We express solidarity with the government's recent announcement of mourning over the death of July frontliner Sharif Osman Hadi.

In light of this, we have decided to postpone the bti-The Daily Star Stellar Women Season 2 gala, scheduled for today, until further notice.

We will announce the revised date for the event later.

A JOINT INITIATIVE BY



The Daily Star