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Justice Zubayer Rahman new CJ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, a senior judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, has been appointed as the 26th chief justice of Bangladesh.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin made the appointment under Article 95(1) of the constitution, as current Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed will retire on December 27, according to a law ministry gazette.

Justice Zubayer got enrolled as an advocate of the District Court and the High Court Division of Supreme Court on March 3, 1985 and May 17, 1997 respectively.

He obtained his LLB (Hons) and LLM from Dhaka University and LLM in International Law from the UK.

He was elevated as additional judge of the HC Division on August 27, 2003 and appointed judge of the same division on August 27, 2005. On August 13, 2024, he was elevated to the Appellate Division.



Journalist leaders form a human chain at the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) yesterday, protesting the attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo and the harassment of New Age Editor Nurul Kabir. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Govt passes stricter tobacco ordinance Revenue concerns trim several draft measures

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The advisory council yesterday approved an anti-tobacco ordinance, expanding the definition of tobacco products and introducing several new provisions to control their use, particularly emerging ones.

Bans under new ordinance

- Production, import, sale and use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices
- Consumption of tobacco products in public places, alongside smoking
- Sale of tobacco products within 100-metre radius of schools, hospitals, playgrounds, children's parks
- All forms of tobacco advertising, including online and digital platforms

The ordinance, however, omitted several sections of the original draft such as the prohibition on the sale of loose or unpackaged tobacco products, which weakened the law intended to control tobacco use.

Proposals to ban the sale of tobacco products through hawking and without registration, as well as a ban on flavors that make tobacco and nicotine products more appealing, were also excluded from the ordinance following recommendations of a finance adviser-led committee, The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the proceedings.

The ordinance incorporated new items such as nicotine pouches as tobacco products and banned

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31 held so far for attacks on Star and Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers have so far arrested 31 people for their alleged involvement in the attacks, looting, and arson at the Karwan Bazar offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday said all those involved in the recent attacks on the offices of the two national dailies will be brought to book.

Briefing reporters at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka, he disclosed the arrest of 31 people.

In a vicious assault on press freedom, mobs launched coordinated attacks on the head offices of the two dailies on the night of December 18 and vandalised the offices, looted valuables, set the buildings ablaze, and trapped journalists and staffers of The Daily Star inside for hours.

Following the incident, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) yesterday arrested three more individuals in connection with the attacks.

The arrestees are Zakir Hossain Shanto, 29, Swapan Mondal, 30, and Niaz Mahmud Farhan, 21.

According to a

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'No more internet blackouts'

Govt approves new telecom ordinance putting guardrails on surveillance

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Advisory Council has finally approved the Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 barring state-led internet shutdowns and introducing limited measures for accountability in surveillance, while establishing a quasi-judicial body comprising members of the government executive body to oversee interception.

A three-member "quasi-judicial council" will be formed to review, approve, amend, or reject interception requests, according to a portion of the approved version of the ordinance seen by The Daily Star.

The council will be chaired by the minister of law, justice and parliamentary affairs, and will include the principal staff officer and the secretary of the home affairs ministry as members.

It will operate independently, free from any administrative, political or institutional influence.

No individual will be eligible to serve as a member of the council if they have been implicated in government reports relating to human rights violations, unlawful surveillance, enforced disappearance or illegal detention; found guilty in departmental inquiries; or previously involved in the misuse or leakage of classified or sensitive information.

The council will mandatorily meet at least once every two weeks to review, approve, modify or reject interception applications and may require justification where necessary.

All council decisions will be documented and auditable, and provisions will exist for appeal against such decisions. Complaints regarding unlawful interception may be filed

with the council.

Any intentional and unauthorised interception, data collection, retention or use will constitute a punishable offence, carrying penalties of up to five years' imprisonment, a fine of up to Tk 1 crore or both. The council, court or administration may recommend budgetary sanctions of up to Tk 99 crore against the concerned agency.

A three-member "quasi-judicial council" will be formed to review, approve, amend, or reject interception requests, according to a portion of the approved version of the ordinance seen by The Daily Star.

An annual national interception report will be prepared detailing the grounds and scope of interception activities. The report will be presented to the parliament and made public. The parliamentary standing committee will annually review operations, budgets and institutional capacity.

All measures adopted under the provision will remain consistent with international best practices in line with the standards of the International Telecommunication Union and the United Nations human rights framework, according to the ordinance.

While the approved ordinance introduces some transparency and accountability in interception, it still falls short of the quasi-judicial council proposed in the first draft

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National unity key to credible polls Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is showing signs of sliding into a "transition trap", with reform commitments failing to translate into meaningful action, speakers said at a roundtable yesterday.

They stressed that forging national unity ahead of the next national election is now imperative to ensure credible polls and maintain public trust democratic process.

They made the observations at a roundtable titled "Electoral System Reform: Progress Review", organised by Shushashoner Jonno Nogorik (Shujan) at the CIRDAP auditorium in the capital.

Addressing the event, Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at CPD, said the country now stands at a critical juncture where the success of the upcoming election will determine whether it retains a democratic environment.

Debapriya, a noted economist, also unveiled a digital "Reform Tracker" to monitor the implementation of recommendations made by the Electoral Reform Commission. Of the 31 reform proposals tracked, only two have been implemented so far, he said. These include measures to reduce the gender gap and provisions to enrol citizens in the voter list who turn 18 shortly before the election schedule.

Four other proposals show limited progress, while the majority remain untouched, reflecting a widening gap

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Traders sorting through heaps of cauliflower, a beloved winter vegetable, at the Bidhimpur market in Rajshahi's Mohanpur upazila yesterday. With good harvests of this year's seasonal produce, including cabbage, gourd, radish and small tomato, prices at the retail market have fallen to Tk 20-40 per kg from Tk 80-120 just days ago. Vegetables from here are shipped to Dhaka, Chattogram and other districts.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Law enforcers' inaction proves govt's complicity

Anu Muhammad tells rally against recent mob attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The law enforcement's inaction during the attacks on The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Chhayanaut and Udichi proves that the government acted as the attackers' associate, Prof Anu Muhammad said at a rally at the National Museum yesterday.



"The police and army were present during the attacks but did nothing. This clearly shows the government stood on the side of those who carried out the destruction," he told the protesters, including students, teachers, office-goers and cultural organisations.

Prof Anu, a member of the Gono Odhikar Parishad, said the attacks were not sudden or a spontaneous act by an angry crowd. "These were planned and targeted attacks. Important documents, musical instruments, computers and institutional property were destroyed and looted systematically."

Referring to the attack on The Daily Star building, he

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HADI MURDER One suspect remanded, another held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed a suspect on a five-day remand in connection with the murder of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson for Inqilab Moncho and a prominent youth leader of the July uprising.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Awlad Hossain Muhammad Jonaid passed the order.



According to the remand prayer, Aminul contacted suspected human trafficker Philip Snal of Haluaghata in Mymensingh through a close relative after the shooting and gave him money to help prime accused Faisal Karim Masud and his associate go into hiding along the border.

Hadi, also an aspirant for the Dhaka 8 constituency in the upcoming polls, was shot in the head on December 12. He died in a hospital in Singapore on December 18.

The Detective Branch said Aminul is reportedly a relative of Tajul Islam Chowdhury Bappy, former councillor of DNCC Ward-6 and organising secretary of Dhaka City North Jubo League. Investigators alleged that Bappy contacted Aminul after the shooting and instructed him to contact Philip. Aminul later sent Tk 5,000 to Philip as directed.

Meanwhile, police arrested Himon Rahman Shikdar, 32, a close associate of Alamgir, who was reportedly riding the motorcycle during the attack, from a hotel in Adabor, said Abdulllah Al Mamun,

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Ataur Rahman Bikrampuri held, sent to jail

STAR REPORT

Ataur Rahman Bikrampuri, known for his highly provocative sermons, online speeches, and Facebook posts, was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail yesterday.



Mehedi Hasan, officer in charge of Tongi East Police Station, told The Daily Star, "Ataur Rahman was handed over to the station after the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested him on the home ministry's instructions."

"After receiving him, we completed the necessary procedures, and then he was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail," the OC added.

Regarding the arrest, Talebir Rahman, deputy commissioner of DMP's media and public relations, said Ataur was detained in Narsingdi on Tuesday night at the request of Gazipur Metropolitan Police (GMP).

A GMP press release said that for the sake of law and order, the home ministry, exercising its authority under section 3(1)

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