

PFUJ condemns attacks on media in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has strongly condemned the recent violence, vandalism and arson targeting media houses in Bangladesh.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, PFUJ President Afzal Butt and Secretary General Arshad Ansari denounced the targeted attacks on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, as well as the assault on Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age and president of the Editors' Council.

"Silencing the press through physical intimidation is a direct violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and the rule of law," the PFUJ leaders said.

They also expressed deep concern over reports that more than 100 journalists in Bangladesh remain detained without trial, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

The PFUJ further highlighted what it described as a disturbing regional trend, pointing to similar incidents of violence in Nepal. Just months ago, mob attacks targeted the Kantipur Group, Annapurna Post and Image TV.

The leadership also paid tribute to photojournalist Suresh Rajak of Avenews TV, who died in an arson attack in Kathmandu on March 28, 2025, noting that the perpetrators of these crimes remain unaccountable.

The PFUJ called upon the governments concerned to conduct fair, impartial and speedy investigations into all incidents of arson and violence, identify and bring the perpetrators to justice, end the culture of impunity and ensure the safety of journalists as they perform their professional duties.

"Violence and harassment aimed at silencing the media are unacceptable in any democratic society," the statement concluded.

RAOZAN IN CHATTOGRAM

New market unused as vendors clog highway

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

A newly constructed kitchen market in the Gohira area of Raozan municipality in Chattogram has remained unused for nearly a year despite shops being handed over to the vendors.

Meanwhile, vendors continue to occupy the Chattogram-Rangamati regional highway daily, causing traffic congestion and hardship for commuters.

The market was built under a Livestock and Dairy Development Project between December 2023 and June 2024 to remove the roadside bazar that regularly blocks the



Rangamati-bound lane of the highway.

However, despite completion of the construction and allocation of shops in December last year, traders have yet to relocate to the new facility.

"Vendors still sit along the highway's Rangamati-bound side every day, forcing vehicles to slow down or squeeze into a single lane, often leading to traffic congestion during peak hours," said Ali Ahsan Sumon, a college teacher who

regularly commutes along the route.

The multipurpose market building was constructed at a cost of Tk 1.20 crore and includes more than 16 separate sheds for poultry, meat and an open shed, said Jayita Basu, upazila livestock officer of Raozan.

The Raozan municipality has already leased out the market to private vendors.

During a recent visit, this correspondent observed vendors selling vegetables by occupying most of the highway's Rangamati-bound lane, while customers shopped amid moving traffic.

Mahbubul Alam, a vegetable vendor, said, "We have heard that the

new market does not have electricity connections and other basic facilities yet. That's why we are still sitting here,"

Nurul Islam, another trader, said they were being told to move to the new market but had not received clear instructions about whom to pay rent to or how the market would be managed.

Locals and vehicle drivers said the roadside market poses serious safety risks.

Nasir Uddin, an auto-rickshaw driver, said navigating the area requires constant caution as accidents occur almost daily.

Contacted, Aungching Marma, municipal administrator and assistant

commissioner (Land) in Raozan, said, "Most vendors sitting on the road are low-income people. Even if we want to, it is not easy to take strict action against them."

He said delayed installation of several utility facilities in the new building had rendered it non-functional. "Last week, we sent municipal engineers to ensure all utilities were installed, and the structure is now ready," he said.

The leaseholders have been repeatedly instructed to start operating from the new building, he added, warning that legal steps would be taken if vendors continue to occupy the highway in disregard of the instructions.

2 more sent to jail over attacks on Star, Prothom Alo

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent two men to jail in connection with the vandalism, arson, and looting at the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Jamshed Alam passed two orders after police produced the accused, Swapan Mondal, 27, and Aminul Islam, 21, before the court seeking their confinement, said a court staffer.

Swapan was arrested on Wednesday in a case filed over the attack on The Daily Star office, while Aminul was arrested in the case filed over the attack on Prothom Alo office. Earlier, 29 people were sent to jail in connection with the two cases.

On December 22, Mizanur Rahman, head of operations at The Daily Star, filed a case with Teigaon Police Station against 350-400 unidentified people under multiple laws, including the Penal Code, Anti-Terrorism Act, Special Powers Act, and Cyber Security Ordinance.

On the same day, Major (ret'd) Sazzadul Kabir, head of security at Prothom Alo, filed a similar case against 400-500 unidentified people over the attack at their Karwan Bazar office.

7.4 lakh registered for postal voting

UNB, Dhaka

Some 7,40,000 voters, including more than 5,34,000 expatriates from different countries around the world, have been registered to vote through postal ballots in the national election scheduled for February 12, 2026.

The Election Commission opened the "Postal Vote Bd" app for Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) on November 19 and for In-Country Postal Voting (ICPV) on December 17.

"The Postal Vote Bd app will remain open for the registration of all entitled voters till December 31," said Ruhul Amin Mollik, director (public relations) at the Election Commission Secretariat, yesterday.

Although the postal balloting system has long been included in the law, it was never practised in previous elections.

Contraceptive

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dropped to 58.2 percent from 62.7 percent in 2019. Access to modern contraception also declined, meeting the needs of 73.5 percent of women compared to 77.4 percent in 2019, shows the survey carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with UNICEF.

DGFP officials said the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply during the Covid pandemic that hit the country in 2020. However, the then government deprioritised family planning rather than boosting contraceptive supply.

In 2023, the health ministry halted the purchase of contraceptives for about a year, resulting in a significant supply gap. It opted to channel funds meant for buying contraceptives towards the procurement of other items. Family planning took a back seat at that time, said a DGFP official, seeking anonymity.

When contacted, DGFP Director General Ashrafi Ahmad said the crisis deepened after the expiry of the Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) in June last year. In the past, most contraceptives were bought under the scheme.

A lack of field-level workers worsened the situation, she said, adding that recruitment for some posts was halted due to legal complications.

CONTRACEPTIVE SUPPLY DROPS

DGFP provides people with five types of contraceptives — condoms, oral pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), injectables, and implants — to people free of cost through its field-level workers across the country.

According to its national contraceptive summary report, condom supply dropped by 57 percent over the last six years.

Condom supply stood at 97.48 lakh in September 2019, months before the Covid outbreak — a period when the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply.

The number continued to decline to 41.52 lakh in September this year, down from 87.31 lakh in September, 2022.

The other four contraceptive items have also seen a steady decline

since 2019: oral pills by 63 percent, IUDs by 64 percent, injectables by 41 percent, and implants by 37 percent.

As of December 11 this year, the agency had stocks of condoms for 39 days; implants for 33 days; IUDs for 45 days; oral pills for five months and 18 days; and injectables for six months and 15 days.

Asked, Abdur Razzaque, director of the DGFP's logistics and supply unit, said they already initiated the purchase of implants.

"These contraceptive items could be restocked soon, provided that an ongoing legal issue over the purchase is resolved."

However, condoms are likely to run out of stock, depriving people of supplies for at least a month, he said.

Razzaque said the government approved a project last month to buy all five types of contraceptives, but the procurement process will take at least three months to complete.

For the time being, DGFP is using available funds to buy condoms in limited quantities, but their supply may still be disrupted for a month next year, he said.

Asked about the manpower shortage, Ershad Ahmed Nomani, deputy director (personnel) of DGFP, said that of the 50,648 field-level posts, at least 12,720 (25 percent) remain vacant.

Those include posts of family planning assistants and inspectors; family welfare volunteers; and sub-assistant community medical officers, he said.

These field-level workers not only distribute contraceptives but also provide advocacy and counselling to service seekers.

All these activities, which are crucial for birth control, have been seriously disrupted due to shortages of contraceptives and manpower, ultimately contributing to the rise in TFR, said Aminul Islam, a professor of Population Sciences at Dhaka University.

He also noted that in recent years, many couples have shown reluctance towards family planning, with some preferring to have more than two children.

"A combination of all these factors explains the recent rise in the total fertility rate," he added.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A US Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier II taxis on the tarmac at the former Roosevelt Roads naval base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, on Wednesday, amid tensions between US President Donald Trump's administration and the government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Key reforms rolled out but case backlog persists

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Despite these measures, delays in case disposal persist across all tiers of the judiciary, with 2.56 lakh cases added to the backlog between July 1, 2024, and September 30 this year.

"The separation of civil and criminal courts at the district level, along with court digitisation initiatives, will improve public access to justice. These reforms reflect significant progress in implementing the Judiciary Reform Commission's recommendations to enhance the judiciary's autonomy and efficiency," said Imran Siddiq, an SC lawyer.

A significant number of the commission's reform goals have been achieved. The establishment of the Secretariat, which was long overdue, marks a milestone in achieving the separation of the judiciary, noted Imran, also a member of the commission's legal team.

"Implementation of reforms has been particularly evident at administrative and institutional levels. But long-term structural reforms, especially those requiring constitutional amendments or extensive

legislative action (such as decentralisation of High Court benches and financial autonomy) may be implemented once an elected government assumes power," he told The Daily Star.

When contacted, SC Spokesperson Md Muajjem Hussain said, "In the past, responsibilities were scattered across various authorities. There was a long-standing demand for an autonomous institution under the Supreme Court, which can take coordinated measures, ensure proper management, and adopt necessary judicial processes or policies," he told The Daily Star.

The new ordinance has paved the way for formulating a coherent policy and streamlining these functions, he noted.

In reply to a query, Muajjem said that once the Secretariat becomes fully operational, it will be able to take measures to reduce the case backlog.

"But the results will not be visible in a day or two. Its impact will be seen in the coming years."

This correspondent tried to

contact Law Adviser Asif Nazrul five times via mobile phone, sent text messages, and emailed him over the past couple of weeks, but received no response.

OTHER REFORMS

Following the Awami League government's ouster, the law ministry made a major reshuffle in the judiciary. It promoted and transferred 1,334 lower court judges, and withdrew around 20,000 politically motivated cases and 410 cases filed by the state under the Cyber Security Law.

It also set up information centres at Chief Judicial Magistrate Courts in all divisional cities to ensure easy public access to case-related data.

The Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance 2025 was formulated with the provision of death penalty as the maximum punishment in enforced disappearance cases.

Besides, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) was amended to ensure safeguards against arbitrary arrest and mandatory preliminary investigation within 48 hours of filing a complaint.

The International Crimes

Tribunal Act was amended, barring the accused in cases under this law from holding or running for public office once formal charges are pressed against them.

In January, the Supreme Court Judge Appointment Ordinance, 2025, was issued, empowering the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council to select suitable candidates for appointment as SC judges.

Between March and August this year, two Appellate Division judges and 25 HC judges were appointed through the council, led by the chief justice.

CASE BACKLOG

The number of pending cases in courts across the country stood at around 47 lakh as of September 30 this year, up from 44.44 lakh on July 1 last year, according to case disposal statements from the SC.

The Appellate Division of the SC saw a rise in pending cases to 39,417 from 28,901 on July 1 last year. They include appeals in connection with the 2009 BDR carnage; Narayanganj seven murders; the killings of AL leader Ahsan Ullah Master, and BUET student Abrar Fahad; and the

Three killed as train runs over pedestrians

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Three people were killed after being run over by a train while walking along the railway tracks near Arikhola railway station in Kaliganj, Gazipur yesterday.

Local sources said the Noakhali-bound Upokul Express was passing Arikhola station around 4:30pm when the victims, walking home between Arikhola railway bridge and Deyaltekh road, failed to hear the train approaching from behind. They were struck and died on the spot, they added.

Arikhola station master Manik Mia said the identities of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Locals informed police, who later recovered the bodies. Kaliganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Zakir Hossain confirmed the deaths, adding that efforts are underway to identify the victims and complete legal procedures.

Holey Artisan attack, said SC sources.

The Appellate Division, however, disposed of several significant political and constitutional cases, including the appeals related to the August 21 grenade attack, the caretaker government system, and the Supreme Judicial Council.

There were 637,882 pending cases with the HC as of September 30, with 60,000 cases added to the backlog since July 1 last year.

Lower courts saw an addition of 185,168 cases to the backlog during the period, with the number of pending cases rising to 40,53,908 as of September 30 this year.

SC sources said the shortage of judges has contributed to the rise in the case backlog. The country currently has 2,302 judges — seven in the Appellate Division; 108 in the HC; and 2,187 in lower courts.

Of the judges, three have been barred from carrying out judicial functions since October 16 last year as the Supreme Judicial Council is probing allegations against them. Another three are on leave.