

Two killed after armed attack on church in Niger

AFP, Niamey

A couple were killed in southwest Niger this week after armed individuals fired into the air inside a church, locals told AFP yesterday.

The incident occurred in the Dosso region of Niger, a Sahel country that has been plagued for a decade by a conflict pitting the military against fighters said to be linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

ACLED, a non-governmental organisation monitoring conflicts around the world, said nearly 2,000 people had died as a result of such violence in Niger this year.

“The attack happened in Mailo village at around 11:00 pm on Wednesday night. Christians were attending mass in the church when armed individuals came in and fired into the air. There was panic,” a local requesting anonymity told AFP.

“A man and his wife ran and hid in their house but (the assailants) followed them and they were killed.”

Another local said some of the churchgoers had fled to neighbouring villages and others had headed for the bush.



Clockwise from left, Tarique Rahman and senior party leaders observe a one-minute silence in memory of the martyred freedom fighters at the National Memorial in Savar last night. Tarique signs the visitors' book. Earlier in the afternoon, BNP leaders and activists joined their hands in prayer for late party founder Ziaur Rahman by the lake outside his mausoleum at Zia Uddin in the capital.



PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL, AMRAN HOSSAIN

Tarique offers prayers at Zia's grave after 19yrs

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As a large number of leaders and activists lined both sides of the road, it took him nearly two hours to reach. Throughout the journey, Tarique waved to supporters from inside his bus.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and other senior leaders received Tarique and accompanied him to the mausoleum complex.

Ahead of Tarique's arrival, law enforcement personnel had been deployed in and around the area from noon.

Visitors inside the park were kept at a safe distance, and no one was allowed to approach the grave.

Around 1:00pm, a large number of party leaders and activists began gathering around the area, carrying banners and photographs of the party leader.

Speaking to journalists at Zia Uddin, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir expressed hope that Bangladesh would become a truly democratic state under Tarique's leadership.

“Tarique Rahman's return is not just a personal comeback; it marks the beginning of a new chapter in the country's politics. It will pave the way for the restoration of democracy and fulfilment of people's aspirations,” Fakhrul said.

He also said people have started dreaming again and that Tarique now stood at the centre of those hopes. Expressing confidence, Fakhrul said Tarique would implement his far-reaching plans for the welfare of the people.

BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas said, “Under the leadership of Tarique Rahman, democracy will fully blossom.”

He said the confusion and uncertainty among the public over election-related issues has been cleared up with Tarique's return. “Tarique Rahman's presence has brought clarity to the political arena. People are now far more confident than before about a free and fair election.”

NATIONAL MEMORIAL VISIT

Later in the night, Tarique visited the National Memorial in Savar. Along with senior party leaders, he paid his respects to the martyred freedom fighters, observed a one-minute silence in their memory, and signed the visitors' book.

Tarique departed from Zia Uddin around 5:00pm and reached the National Memorial around 10:00pm.

As tributes are required to be paid before sunset, BNP Standing Committee members Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Abdul Moyeen Khan reached Savar before Tarique and placed wreaths at the memorial on his behalf.

It took Tarique around five hours to get to Savar from Zia Uddin, as party leaders and activists crowded in front of his vehicle at various points along the route. Members of the army and police escorted him amid the heavy crowd, while the vehicle moved forward slowly. On the way, Tarique stood at the front of his bus and waved to party leaders and activists.

At around 10:30pm, he left the National Memorial and returned to his Gulshan residence around midnight.

TODAY'S AGENDA

Today, Tarique is expected to formally register as a voter. After completing the process, he will visit the grave of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi near the Dhaka University Central Mosque.

He will then go to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), popularly known as Pangu Hospital, to meet those injured in last year's July uprising.

Restoring party discipline now key task

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According to Ain o Salih Kendra, internal clashes within BNP and its associate bodies led to 259 incidents between January and November 2025, leaving at least 66 people dead and 2,923 injured. Analysts say the figures underscore the urgency of restoring discipline.

Tensions have also surfaced over seat allocation. After the BNP announced nominations and agreed to leave some seats for alliance partners, protests broke out in several districts.

In Jashore's Manirampur area, leaders and activists yesterday

protested after BNP decided not to field a candidate in Jashore-5.

Similar demonstrations took place in Nilphamari-1 after Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam announced a candidate, while grassroots leaders also protested in Kishoreganj-4 and Jhenaidah-4 over seats left for partners.

In Brahmanbaria-2, BNP leader Rumeen Farhana has begun campaigning as an independent candidate after being denied a party nomination.

Political analyst Mojibur said Tarique should avoid being surrounded by leaders who only offer praise and fail to present the real

picture of the party.

He said Tarique should quickly assess the organisation's actual condition, warning that if BNP leaders contest seats left for alliance partners, doubts and dissatisfaction toward him could grow.

Several BNP Standing Committee members said some political parties have already begun spreading false information against the BNP.

Since Tarique's return, misleading content about him has circulated on social media, they said, making it another challenge to counter such narratives while maintaining the party's position ahead of the election.

4 killed, several hurt as launches collide in Meghna

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place as drivers of the vessels failed to see each other due to heavy fog.

Abdullah Al Mamun, superintendent of Dhaka district river police, confirmed the recovery of bodies of three men and a woman and their identities.

Several injured passengers were hospitalised, he added.

Jhalakathi police seized MV Adventure 9 after it anchored at the Jhalakathi launch terminal yesterday morning.

Four staffers were detained for interrogation.

SM Bayzid Ibne Akbar, additional superintendent of police (Sadar circle) of Jhalakathi, said the launch was handed over to the river police for further legal steps.

Barishal river police Superintendent Nazmul Haque said the Chandpur river Police would take the next actions as the incident occurred there.

Hours after the incident, Shipping Adviser Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain told reporters, “Launches operating without licenced drivers, failing to turn on lights, or violating regulations will have their licences and route permits revoked.”

The adviser said a committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

“The way one vessel hit the other suggests that the person operating it may have fallen asleep or handed control to someone else.”

The adviser said launches have been instructed not to operate at night during foggy conditions until visibility improves.

The families of the deceased in the incident will get Tk 1.5 lakh each, and the injured Tk 50,000 each, he added.

Zullikar Ali, traffic inspector of the BIWTA's marine safety and traffic management department in Barishal, said there is a directive to suspend all vessel movement when visibility drops below 100 metres.

“As part of cautionary measure, we made public announcements using microphones at the Barishal river port in this regard on Thursday. However, such announcements could not be made on Thursday in Jhalakathi as we do not have any staffer posted there,” he said.

He added that action is being taken against those who ignored the restrictions and continued vessel operations despite dense fog.

A year of strikes, setbacks and disruptions

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The troubles began in January and escalated swiftly. Primary school teachers, demanding salary upgrades, attempted to march towards Shahbagh intersection from the Central Shaheed Minar, only to be blocked by police. By May, the unrest had hardened into a nationwide strike affecting all 65,567 government primary schools. Over 380,000 teachers walked out, and one crore students were locked out of schools. The government's eventual offer to upgrade assistant teachers was rejected, leading to a tenuous truce that barely lasted the summer.

The discord was not limited to primary education. In October, teachers from MPO-unlisted institutions (private schools that receive state subsidies) occupied the streets near the National Press Club. Their demand was modest: a house rent allowance of 20 percent of their basic salary, replacing a flat rate of Tk 1,500 that remained frozen for years.

The government's response was aggressive: police used water cannons, sound grenades, and batons. More than 100 teachers were injured. A similar scene played out in November with primary teachers. “Investment in teachers has been minimal for a long time,” said Rasheda K Choudhury, the executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).

“When basic financial demands are ignored, protests become inevitable,” said Rasheda, also former adviser to a caretaker government.

She pointed out a grim double standard: while other interest groups saw demands met peacefully, teachers were beaten in the streets.

If the streets were chaotic, the classrooms were in a state of confusion. The year began with a textbook fiasco — the National Curriculum and Textbook Board failed to distribute books on time — and then saw the government surrender to vested groups over recruitment of music and physical education teachers.

In August, the government moved to appoint these teachers in government primary schools. But three months later, the plan was scrapped following pressure from Islamist groups, including Hefazat-e-Islam. The retreat was described by Rasheda as “capitulation,” warning that removal of holistic learning sends “conflicting signals” in a state that ostensibly promotes culture.

The most damning verdict on the system, however, came from the examination papers of school students. The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) pass rate plummeted to 58.83 percent, the lowest in two decades. The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) pass rate fared little better, hitting a 16-year low.

Officials blamed the removal of “sympathetic marking” — a euphemism for grade inflation — for this year's poor show. Rasheda argues this is merely a “warning, not a shock,” exposing the “real picture” of learning gaps that have widened during years of neglect.

In another incident, two staffers of a bulk carrier lost their lives after a passenger launch rammed into their sand-laden vessel in the Buriganga in Narayanganj's Fatullah early yesterday, causing it to capsize.

The victims were Zohurul Islam Shakil, 25, of Patukhali; and Md Hasan, 20, of Jhalakathi.

The bulk carrier was anchored, said BIWTA Assistant Director Kamrul Hasan, adding that the bodies were recovered from the sunken vessel's engine room around 4:45pm, he added.

While three members of the bulk carrier, MV Kashfa Sneha, managed to swim ashore, the two others remained trapped inside. Thick fog might have caused the accident, said Inspector Akibul Islam, in charge of Pagla river police outpost.

Narayanganj Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer SM Fayez Uddin told reporters that river police seized the Dhaka-bound launch, Sundarban-16.

Legal action will be taken in connection with the incident, he said. [Our correspondents from Barishal, Jhalakathi, Chandpur, and Narayanganj contributed to this report.]

The apathy toward the sector was also evident in the budget, which saw the allocation for primary education fall by over Tk 3,000 crore in FY2025-26. The budget of 95,644 crore accounts for 1.72 percent of the country's GDP.

But the human cost of this chaotic year is not reflected in the budget but in the tragedy of July 21, when an Air Force training jet crashed into a school in Uttara, killing 36 people, including students and teachers. It is also reflected in institutional failures affecting children like Rafia in Narsingdi, who are “gradually moving out of the system,” as Rasheda warns.

This correspondent tried to reach Education Adviser Prof CR Abrar via his mobile phone and WhatsApp over the last few days but he did not respond to calls or messages.

In a year overshadowed by turmoil, one faint spark of democratic practice flickered. After decades of suspension, student union elections returned to four major public universities, including Dhaka and Jahangirnagar.

The polls were peaceful, a rarity in Bangladesh, and the results tilted heavily towards candidates backed by Islami Chhatra Shibir. While these elections reopened long-closed spaces for debate, they stood in stark contrast to the pressure-driven decisions such as arbitrary cancellation of exams, and harassment of teachers which Rasheda describes as a failure to “build a culture of listening to dissent”.

Will not leave Shahbagh

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Shahbagh and explain what steps have been taken so far to ensure justice.

He said maintaining state stability is the responsibility of the government, not the people, and warned of a nationwide blockade if immediate action is not taken.

Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho and a prominent figure of the July uprising, was shot on December 12, a day after the Election Commission announced the schedule for the next national election. He was airlifted to Singapore for advanced treatment, where he died on the

demonstration led by Inqilab Moncho blocked Shahbagh around 2:30 pm. Vehicular movement has remained halted since then.

The platform had earlier announced a three-point demand: formation of a speedy trial tribunal and completion of the trial within a maximum of 30 working days; an impartial investigation involving internationally recognised professional agencies; identification, arrest and prosecution of Awami terrorists allegedly hiding within civil and military intelligence agencies, along with the resignation of the home affairs adviser, the special



Protesters at Shahbagh around 1:00am today.

PHOTO: STAR

night of December 18.

His death sparked widespread outrage and calls for swift and exemplary punishment of those responsible.

Jaber urged political parties to be vocal in demanding a trial. “If you do not stand up for the trial of this murder, the people of Bangladesh will assume that you, too, have a hand in it,” he said.

Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, told The Daily Star that a

assistant and the law adviser.

Jaber said Hadi's fight against cultural hegemony remains ongoing. “In line with Hadi's principles and objectives, this struggle will continue. It is a fight to protect our independence and sovereignty,” he added.

He declared the area “Shaheed Osman Hadi Chattar,” saying, “From today, this square will bear the name of Shaheed Osman Hadi. Our movement will remain active on the streets until justice is served.”

NCP-Jamaat deal

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She also said that women leaders declined an offer to contest the election as candidates under the possible seat-sharing deal with Jamaat.

Confirming that talks are under way, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon that discussions with the NCP were being held on a one-to-one basis.

“There is a possibility of sharing seats, and the issue will become clear very soon,” he said, adding that clarity would emerge before the December 29 deadline for submitting nomination papers.

Porwar said the final outcome would depend on the nomination submission process, possible withdrawals, and continued discussions.

He also noted that before 2026, Jamaat would decide whether to form an alliance, pursue seat-sharing deals, or contest the election through another arrangement.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter declined to give a specific timeline but said a decision would be taken shortly.

He also said that discussions with both Jamaat and BNP were ongoing and that no final decision had yet been made.

According to NCP sources, the party had been preparing to contest the election alone for the past two months. That posture shifted after the killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Moncho and an independent candidate for Dhaka-8.

He was shot in broad daylight on December 12 and died six days later at a hospital in Singapore. Since then, security concerns among NCP leaders

and activists have intensified, while party leaders have increasingly felt that alignment with a major political force is necessary to consolidate the NCP's place in national politics.

With BNP yet to make its position on reforms and the July charter referendum clear, some NCP leaders now view Jamaat as a more suitable option.

Sources said that although no official announcement has been made, most members expressed support for sharing seats with Jamaat during the past two days of executive committee meetings.

A member who attended Thursday night's meeting, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the committee has more than 50 members, 40 of whom were present.

“They discussed election participation and seat-sharing deal with Jamaat. Except for three members, everyone gave a positive signal in favour of a deal,” he said.

He added that the committee asked Nahid and Akhter to determine the conditions and process of any such arrangement.

Explaining the reasoning behind the shift, the leader said BNP has moved far from the commitments it made under the July charter, particularly on state reforms and the referendum.

He claimed the BNP has instructed its candidates not to campaign in favour of the July charter, reforms, or the referendum, and that the party has lagged behind in alliance and seat-sharing talks with the NCP.

BNP sources, however, said that until yesterday evening, the NCP had not contacted the party by phone to arrange any meeting or discussion.