

Two sent to jail over attack on Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent two people to jail in a case filed over vandalism, arson and looting at the head office of Prothom Alo in Dhaka.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Didarul Alam passed the order after police produced the accused before the court, seeking their confinement, said a court staffer.

The two arrestees are Rubel Hossain, 38, and Nazmul Hasan, 21. They were arrested on Friday in the city's Pallabi area.

On December 22, Maj (retd) Sazzadul Kabir, head of security at the Prothom Alo office, filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station against 400-500 unidentified people under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance over the attack on the newspaper's office in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar area.

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PATURIA-DAULATDIA Ferry services resume after 15hrs amid fog

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia waterway resumed yesterday morning after remaining suspended for about 15 hours due to dense fog, officials said.

Operations restarted around 10:00am after visibility improved, said Abdus Salam, deputy general manager of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at the Aricha office.

He said the authorities had suspended all types of ferry movement on the route from 7:15pm on Friday as thick fog reduced visibility to unsafe levels.

During the suspension, three ferries -- Shah Makhdom, Enayetur and Bhasha Shaheed Barkat -- were stranded midstream, he added.

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Top, Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh, bottom, Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association form human chains in front of the Dhaka Reporters Unity and the Jatiya Press Club respectively yesterday, protesting the attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star and the harassment of New Age Editor Nurul Kabir.

PHOTO: STAR

'A serious threat to press freedom, democracy'

Journalist leaders condemn attacks on Star, Prothom Alo; demand justice, safety for journos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists yesterday continued strong condemnation of the recent attacks, vandalism, and arson targeting The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, saying such acts

pose a serious threat to press freedom and democracy.

They demanded an immediate and impartial investigation, identification of those responsible and their patrons, and exemplary punishment. They also called

for stronger measures to ensure journalists' safety and protect media freedom.

The demands were raised at separate protest programmes held in Dhaka and Brahmanbaria.

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Section of govt allowed attacks

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"Since the proactiveness that was supposed to be there was missing, just as the media has suffered damage, our damage has not been little either. We, as the government, realise this damage," Rizwana said.

She termed the arsonists "common adversaries". "If you do not like someone's opinion, open a newspaper of dissenting opinion. You cannot set fire to a newspaper and think your problem is solved," she said.

Calling for a united fight against those instilling fear, the adviser said she herself had faced security threats.

She also said she aims to issue the Broadcast Commission Ordinance and the Press Commission Ordinance, and to finalise the leadership of the Information Commission, during her tenure as an adviser.

Speaking at the conference, Kamal Ahmed, head of the Media Reform Commission and consulting editor of The Daily Star, expressed deep frustration that not a single recommendation of the commission has been implemented in the nine months since the report was submitted.

"I cannot say that even a single one of the proposals has been implemented so far. For this, I am sorry," Kamal said.

Addressing the information adviser, Kamal said perhaps blame could not be placed on her shoulders, but that blame could certainly be placed on the shoulders of the interim government.

"The truth is, the interim government has done nothing," he said.

Kamal said the commission submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on March 22.

The chief adviser told us, 'Make a separate list of the immediately implementable ones. We will take steps to implement those very soon.' We provided that list within just 24 hours. I heard he gave instructions a few times, but nothing happened," Kamal said.

He criticised officials of the information ministry for showing busyness by sending the report to various departments for opinions, only to later say that the recommendations could not be implemented.

Kamal also highlighted the government's failure to act on the recommendation to merge BTV, Bangladesh Betar and BSS into an autonomous institution. He said two committees formed under advisers CR Abrar and Wahiduddin Mahmud produced no results.

"There is no time left now. At least a score of recommendations could have been implemented just by issuing a directive," Kamal added.

Moderated by journalist Shahnaz

Cold wave, dense fog disrupt

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Srinagar Fire Service and Civil Defence rushed to the spot and carried out rescue operations.

Dewan Azad Hossain, station officer of Srinagar Fire Service, said the injured were taken to Srinagar Health Complex. As the condition of several victims deteriorated, they were later referred to Dhaka for advanced treatment.

Vehicular movement on the expressway remained suspended for some time following the accident.

The damaged bus, Tungipara Express, was seized by Hasara Highway Police, while the truck fled the scene immediately after the incident.

Speakers at the conference termed the incident a "black day for the media".

Youth tied

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While undergoing treatment before coming to Dhaka, Siju told local journalists that two youths -- Nur, brother of a local shopkeeper, and Anwar from Saratnagar -- tied him to a pole and hacked him, according to a video of Siju's statement.

In the video, shared by his family, Siju also alleged that a local Jamaat leader, Abdur Razzak, had called Nur and Anwar to carry out the attack.

"Even if my son had any fault, can Jamaat take the law into their own hands? They hacked him in a way meant to ensure his death," Siju told this newspaper, alleging that her son was targeted for being a BNP activist.

Shibganj Police Station Officer in Charge Humayun Kabir said Siju's father, Robul Islam, filed a case on the night of December 24 on charges of attempted murder.

Sub-Inspector Gopal Chandra Mondal, the investigating officer, said the case names three accused and includes 10-12 unidentified individuals.

Two brothers from Omarpur village -- Abdul Razzak, 32, and Shah Alam, 30 -- were arrested on December 26 and sent to jail following a court order, he added.

Police are continuing efforts to arrest Nur and Anwar, Mondal said.

Contacted, Durul Huda, media secretary of Jamaat's Shibganj upazila unit, denied the allegations, calling them part of a political conspiracy.

"Siju is a person of bad character with many allegations against him. Locals were very angry with him. However, we condemn the way he was attacked and demand justice," he said.

Asked whether arrested Razzak was involved with Jamaat, Huda said, "Razzak holds no official position; he is a Jamaat supporter. This is an attempt to tarnish Jamaat's image before the elections. Razzak cannot commit such an act."

Minorities worry

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play an appropriate role in cases of minority and ethnic persecution. "To address this, a Diversity Commission must be formed."

Ittekharuzzaman also urged turning the draft Anti-Discrimination Law into an ordinance to protect minority rights.

The parishad's acting general secretary Manindra Kumar Nath said religious minorities are increasingly concerned about their security as the February polls near and certain groups are out to abuse religion for political gains.

"Many parties and organisations have also expressed concerns over election-time security. In both local and national elections, minorities often face unnecessary threats, attacks and harassment simply for voting for or against a particular candidate," he added.

"If the government and the Election Commission fail to ensure their security, minorities may be discouraged from going to polling centres and exercising their right to vote."

Presenting a concept paper at the discussion, he said, "Even under the interim government, religious and

after remaining suspended for nearly 15 hours due to dense fog.

In its bulletin, the Met Office said yesterday that moderate to dense fog is likely in some areas across the country from midnight to morning, and in some areas it may persist until noon.

The drop in temperature has caused severe hardship, especially in the northern regions. Cold winds and dense fog have disrupted daily life, hitting low-income workers, day labourers and floating people the hardest.

Temperatures in Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, and Bandarban hovered between 10°C and 11°C.

The country's lowest temperature was recorded in Jashore at 8.8°C.

In Dhaka and other parts of the country, the feeling of cold has increased over the past five days due to a sharp fall in temperatures.

Dhaka recorded a minimum of 13°C on Friday, down from 14°C the day before.

Minimum temperatures in most parts of the country ranged between 10°C and 13°C.

The weather office warned that temperatures may drop further in the coming days, with the intensity of cold and fog likely to increase.

Explosives seized

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The explosion occurred at the madrasa in the Hasnabad Housing area around 10:00am on Friday, causing severe damage to the madrasa building and nearby establishments.

Two of Al Amin's children were injured and treated at Ad Din Hospital before being transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Al Amin fled the scene.

Speaking to reporters at Keraniganj Police Station yesterday, Dhaka District Superintendent of Police Mizanur Rahman said the 400 litres of chemicals were likely hydrogen peroxide and other flammable liquids.

"We suspect these chemicals were being used for a specific purpose. The family members are being questioned to determine the source and intended use."

He said police conducted a thorough search and found a laptop, two monitors, explosive-like materials, chemicals stored in drums, and four crude bomb-like objects in the presence of locals. "We alerted the Bomb Disposal Unit, the Anti-Terrorism Unit, and the CID's crime scene unit ... A seizure list is being prepared by the CID."

About the cause of Friday's explosion, he said, "Since chemicals and crude bomb-like objects were found, it is primarily assumed that there was some kind of chemical reaction with an explosive substance. Further investigation will determine the cause... We are also investigating whether there was any plan of sabotage ahead of the national election."

The SP added that primary interrogation revealed that Al Amin faces multiple cases in and around Dhaka, with seven filed across the capital. "He was arrested twice in 2017 and 2020 and was also in jail. He was released on bail in 2023 and drove an auto rickshaw for some time. Currently, he has been working as an Uber driver."

In 2017, Rab arrested three suspects, including Al Amin, linked to Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, he added.

Several cases have also been filed against Asmani Khatun, alias Asma, nationwide, Mizanur said, adding that Asiya's brother Mufti Harun, who is another director of the madrasa, is currently abroad.

Visiting the explosion site, this correspondent saw over a dozen containers labelled "hydrogen peroxide".

According to police, Al Amin, a resident of Bagerhat's Mollahat upazila, ran the madrasa, with about 25-30 students, in two rooms of a flat on the ground floor of a building. Of the remaining two rooms, one was

JNU STUDENT POLLS Campaigning ends amid hope for a fair election

RAKIB MADBER

Campaigning for the Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUCSU) and hall union elections officially ended yesterday, having begun on December 15.

This will be the first JnUCSU election since the establishment of the university. Voting is scheduled for December 30, while vote counting and result announcements are set for December 30 or 31.

Throughout the campaign period, the campus came alive with political discussions and a festive atmosphere.

Candidates reached out to students through direct interactions, manifesto announcements, and various programmes, outlining their visions and promises for the university.

With campaigning now over, both candidates and voters share expectations of an inclusive, transparent, and secure voting process that ensures genuine student representation.

Mehren

Khanam, a student of Mass Communication and Journalism, said, "Students have only one demand for the first JnUCSU election -- the election must be conducted fairly."

Suyail Ahmed, another student, said, "We have heard allegations of irregularities in previous DUCSU elections. We hope nothing like that happens in our election."

Ivan Tahseeb, general secretary (GS) candidate of the Socialist Student Front-backed Maulana Bhashani Brigade panel, expressed concern over the election process.

"We are worried about a fair election, as several actions by the university election commission have raised questions about its competence. Violations of the electoral code of conduct have occurred regularly, but the commission has failed to take action," he said.

AKM Rakib, vice president (VP) candidate of the Chhatra Dal-backed Oikoboddo Nirbeek JnUian panel, said they had made their best efforts to reach students.

"We received a very positive response. Now we expect a fair, peaceful, and secure election. We do not want unrest like that seen on other campuses," he said.

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used as a living room, while he lived in the other with his family.

Parveen Begum, the owner of the building, said that on April 1, 2022, a man named Harun rented two four-room flats in the building for Tk 10,000 per month, claiming he would run an orphanage and a madrasa there.

"The building was constructed on three and a half decimals of land with a five-storey foundation, though only the ground floor was fully built. Later, Al Amin and his wife ran the madrasa there and used to pay the rent on the 20th of every month."

She added that the building had no gas connection and that cooking was done in a rear room using a cylinder, which remains intact.

Asked whether there were any suspicious items inside the madrasa, she said she never entered the premises. "I only saw children studying and guardians waiting there when I went to collect rent."

Parveen said she lives in Dhaka's Ganda area. Her two sons live abroad, and she had built the building with the money they sent.

"The building is now completely destroyed. All my hard-earned money has been lost," she said, breaking down in tears while visiting the scene.

Asked whether she had known anything about Al Amin beforehand, she said she knew nothing. "No one in the neighbourhood told me anything, nor did anyone express any suspicion."

At the site, this correspondent saw severe damage to the madrasa building's roof and walls, with debris scattered up to 100 yards away. A small attic was destroyed, while stairs, walls, ceilings and furnishings inside were broken and scattered.

Mosharraf Hossain, owner of a nearby CNG garage, said the explosion destroyed a wall of his garage and blew tin sheets off the roof, scattering rocks and debris everywhere.

Myanmar goes

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