

8 remanded over attack on Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed eight people on two-day remand each in a case filed over the vandalism and arson attack on the Prothom Alo office in the capital's Karwan Bazar.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Hasan Shahadat passed the order after police produced the accused before the court with a seven-day remand prayer, said a court sub-inspector.

The eight are Naim Islam, 25; Saidur Rahman, 25; Abul Kashem, 33; Pranto Sikdar, 21; Raju Ahmed, 33; Sagar Islam, 37; Mohammad Jahangir, 28; and Mohammad Hasan, 22.

After the attack on the night of December 18, the case was filed by the newspaper on December 22 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.

Property looted from the office during the attack is valued at Tk 2.5 crore, while the total damage from vandalism and arson is estimated at Tk 32 crore, according to the case statement.



Government supporters march in Caracas on Wednesday, demanding the release of Venezuela's ousted President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, following their capture in a US operation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Law and order lapses stoke public fears

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted by The Daily Star on Wednesday, Dr Tawhidul Haque, associate professor at the Institute of Social Welfare and Research of Dhaka University, said, "The ongoing operation is not sufficiently addressing the crime situation. With the election fast approaching, the failure to apprehend escaped criminals and recover looted weapons are causing anxiety among the people.

"Despite many arrests under Operation Devil Hunt, the rise in targeted killings and political violence is deeply troubling. If this trend continues, it is likely to undermine voter participation, as citizens may be reluctant to risk their lives."

He added, "For a genuinely participatory and fear-free election, law enforcement agencies and the Election Commission must take more stringent actions to ensure a stable and democratic environment."

However, AHM Sahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general of police, said, "While there are challenges in the current law and order situation, Bangladesh Police is working tirelessly to bring it under control.

"Despite limitations and fast evolving circumstances, we are ramping up patrols, conducting operations against criminals, maintaining intelligence surveillance, and taking prompt legal action. The police are performing their duties with professionalism and dedication to protect public life and property and to maintain normalcy."

SPATE OF KILLINGS

At least four murders have taken place in Dhaka city alone so far this year.

In the latest incident on January 8 (Wednesday), unidentified assailants shot dead former Swechhasebak Dal leader Azizur Rahman Musabbir and injured another man near the Super Star Hotel in Karwan Bazar.

On the first day of the year, Naem Kibria, a lawyer, was beaten to death after a private car collided with his motorcycle in the Bashundhara Residential Area.

On the same day, Shipon, a 24-year-old surgical assistant for circumcision procedures, was hacked to death in the Hazaribagh Zhauchar area. Police brought him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition, where doctors declared him dead.

On January 6, scrap dealer Shahabuddin was hacked to death in Kadamtali.

Outside the capital, village doctor Khokon Chandra, who was critically injured in a knife and arson attack in Shariatpur's Damudya upazila on December 30, died at Dhaka Medical

College Hospital on January 3.

Two days later, three murders were reported in three districts: Rana Pratap Bairagi, a trader in Jashore's Monirampur, was shot in the head; Mohammad Jane Alam Sikder, a Youth Party leader in Chattogram's Raozan, was shot dead; and businessman Moni Chakraborty was hacked to death in Narsingdi's Palash upazila.

On January 6, police recovered the body of Mohammad Shahed Islam, a student who had been missing for a day, in Chattogram.

PHQ data shows 3,785 murder cases were filed across the country last year, including cases related to killings during the uprising. In 2023, 3,023

Contacted, Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujon, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Brihattar Paikari Kacha Bazar Arot Byabasayi Malik Samity, said, "The operation [Devil Hunt] needs to be strengthened, especially with the upcoming election. Disturbances are already visible. With looted weapons yet to be recovered, public concern is natural."

National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain described the election-time law and order as "very disappointing".

After a meeting with the Election Commission on Tuesday, he said, "Since the announcement of the polls schedule, a known criminal recently

arrested suspects and crime scenes, including after a gunfight between rival criminal groups in Chandgaon. In another case, bullet casings marked "police" were found at the scene of a businessman's murder.

Similar instances have been reported in Dhaka and other districts, where suspects confessed to using firearms stolen from police stations during the unrest.

An official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, requesting anonymity, said a portion of the looted firearms were sold to criminal gangs in Dhaka.

Residents of Mohammadpur alleged that firearms looted from Mohammadpur and Adabor police stations are now in criminal hands.

ESCAPED INMATES STILL AT LARGE

Around 2,241 inmates, including 88 death-row convicts, fled prisons during and after the uprising. Of them, around 710 remain at large.

Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Syed Muhammad Motahar Hussain said efforts to capture the fugitives and recover looted weapons have stalled due to limitations.

"Multiple operations were conducted at known addresses, but without success. We suspect some may have fled the country. We also don't have documentation for about 178 escapees, particularly from Narsingdi jail, as records were destroyed.

"The relevant ministry and law enforcement agencies are aware of the issue. We have raised it in law and order meetings, and efforts are ongoing."

OPERATION DEVIL HUNT SO FAR

Following the launch of the second phase on December 13, law enforcement agencies arrested 15,009 people and seized 218 firearms by January 6.

In August last year, the government announced rewards for information leading to recoveries, but no major breakthroughs have been reported.

During the first phase, from February 8 to March 2 last year, 12,220 people were arrested, while 188 locally made weapons and 50 firearms were recovered.

After a January 5 advisory council meeting, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said all forces were directed to work in coordination and intensify grassroots activities before and during the election.

"Instructions were given to take all necessary measures to ensure stability during political programmes and campaigning," he said, urging cooperation to ensure a conducive election environment.

Karwan Bazar.

Musabbir did not live in the Tejguri Bazar area. His wife said he visited the area occasionally.

According to the case statement, Musabbir was with friends on the second floor of Hotel Superstar before leaving for home with Masud on Wednesday night. When they reached in front of Ahsanullah Institute in Tejguri Bazar around 8:20pm, four to five armed assailants blocked their way and opened fire indiscriminately.

Musabbir was shot in the right elbow and the right side of his abdomen and he collapsed on the spot. When Masud tried to help him, the attackers shot him in the left side of his abdomen.

His autopsy was done at the Dhaka Medical College morgue yesterday.

In front of the morgue, his wife Suraiya told The Daily Star, "I cannot say for certain who was behind the killing. Since CCTV footage is available, I hope law enforcers will check it and take swift action against the attackers."

"Incidents like this have happened before, are happening now, and may happen again. Without a proper investigation, many more families like mine will suffer," she said.

BNP planning clampdown

FROM PAGE 1

Tarique Rahman should intervene and instruct the grassroots leaders to work for the party nominees.

Not only are grassroots leaders not working for their party nominees, but partners are also unhappy and angry, as local BNP leaders are not being cooperative.

In Munshiganj-3 constituency, where Quamruzzaman Ratan, social welfare affairs secretary of BNP's central committee, has been nominated, district BNP Member Secretary Mohiuddin Ahmed is also contesting the polls, causing a division among the supporters of the two leaders.

Ratan said, "My pain comes from seeing my party divided. Our leader, Tarique Rahman, wants a united BNP. Those who spread confusion and those who run as independents while still carrying the party's identity ... I don't think both can go hand in hand. I hope the party will take action on this matter."

The situation is similar in Noakhali-6, where the BNP-nominated candidate and two other BNP leaders are contesting, causing a split among grassroots leaders that is likely to benefit rival party contenders.

Speaking anonymously, a candidate from the seat, said, "BNP leaders and activists are divided into three factions. The party high command does not consider grassroots opinions, which is why many leaders are working against the party."

"The party should discuss the issues with grassroots leaders and resolve the matters as soon as possible."

In Manikganj-1, BNP has nominated district convening committee member SA Jinnah Kabir, while former district BNP joint convener Tojammel Haq is running, who has been expelled from

the party.

Jinnah said, "Over the last 15 years, BNP grassroots leaders and activists have struggled. It is normal for several candidates to contest as independents, but I believe that they will withdraw their nominations and work for the party nominees together."

Some grassroots leaders have remained inactive, while partners have also alleged that they are not receiving support from BNP's grassroots leaders.

In Jhenaidah-4, Rashed Khan, who joined the BNP after resigning as general secretary of Gono Odhikar Parishad, accused supporters of a BNP rebel candidate of intimidation and issuing threats.

In Cumilla-7, Redwan Ahmed, who joined the BNP after stepping down as LDP general secretary, said he does not expect support from BNP rebels, even if they withdraw from the race.

Political analysts warned that if Tarique fails to address the dissatisfaction among party leaders, the situation could worsen.

Prof Sabbir Ahmed, Dhaka University's political science department, said, "This is bad for the party. If Tarique Rahman seriously discusses with the party leaders and can satisfy them with alternative solutions, then may be the situation will return to normal. If not, the party will fall into a crisis."

"If there was a practice in the party to decide nominations through internal elections, it would have been better."

Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, former professor at Jahangirnagar University's government and politics department, said, "The rebel candidates have their own supporters, and they have already made investments. Even if they don't get party tickets, they are not withdrawing from the election."

Govt to fix prices of all 295 essential drugs

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted, Zakir Hossain, secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, said the association had been made aware of the approval but had not yet received official documents. "We will give our formal reaction after reviewing them," he told this correspondent last night.

According to the World Health Organization, essential medicines are those that meet priority healthcare needs based on public health relevance, evidence of benefit and harm, cost-effectiveness, and affordability.

The existing list of 285 essential medicines was last updated in 2016. Of these, the government directly sets prices for 117 widely used drugs, while the rest are approved based on proposals from manufacturers.

The National Drug Policy 2016, citing WHO guidelines and expert opinions, recommends that the essential drug list be revised every two years.

However, it has only been updated twice since its inception in 1982: once in 2008 and again in 2016.

This time, around 135 new medicines have been added, replacing many from the previous list, sources said.

According to Prof Sayedur, the National Drug Policy 1982 led to the expansion of the country's pharmaceutical sector and helped make medicines available to the public.

However, a change introduced in 1994 limited government price control to only 117 of the then total drugs, instead of all medicines, resulting in price increases for drugs outside the list and causing public suffering, he added.

He noted that nearly two-thirds

Cops focusing on turf war in Karwan Bazar

FROM PAGE 1

Investigators are exploring possible links to a local turf war, control over Karwan Bazar, and political rivalry as motives behind the killing.

His wife, Suraiya Begum, told the police that her husband had been getting repeated threats to his life, Tejgaon Division Deputy Commissioner Ibne Mizan told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, she did not specify who issued the threats or why, police said. The police official said Musabbir had never reported the threats to law enforcers.

Musabbir, former general secretary of Swechhasebak Dal's Dhaka north unit, was shot just after 8:00pm on Wednesday in an alley near Hotel Superstar on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

He was accompanied by Abu Sufian Bepari Masud, general secretary of Tejgaon Van Workers' Union, who sustained bullet injuries in the attack.

Masud was undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Musabbir's wife yesterday filed a murder case with Tejgaon Police Station, accusing four-five unidentified assailants.

He was a BNP-backed candidate for the councillor post in ward-26 of Tejgaon

in the city corporation polls in 2020.

A police official familiar with the investigation said they suspect that a top criminal was behind the murder, allegedly over extortion and councillor elections.

Family members and party activists claimed that Musabbir spent much of his time in jail during the Awami League regime and was repeatedly arrested in political cases.

Seeking anonymity, a senior Detective Branch official told The Daily Star that police are looking into several issues, including internal conflicts and attempts to establish dominance in Karwan Bazar. "We have already questioned several individuals as part of the investigation."

According to Karwan Bazar traders, a large stretch of the footpath in the area has long been illegally occupied by vendors, from whom AL leaders and local gangs collected extortion money. The footpath is divided into several segments.

Following the uprising, investigators claimed that the area is now controlled by various gangs with ties to political parties. Musabbir was attempting to take control of the area, the traders alleged.

On December 29 last year, a human chain of traders against extortion came under attack. Police arrested 11 people in

this connection.

Besides, police are also probing another dispute involving the control of a garage in the Farmgate area.

"These issues are being checked to see whether they align with the threats mentioned by his wife," said a police official involved in the probe, adding that political motive behind the killing is also being looked into.

However, Musabbir's younger brother Mahbubur Rahaman Azmaine dismissed the allegations of extortion against his brother and told this newspaper that his brother was involved in water supply business and providing internet services.

Meanwhile, police have checked CCTV footage from the area and identified two suspects. "One of their faces is partially visible. If we can identify him, it will significantly advance the investigation," said police official Ibne Mizan.

Police said CCTV footage shows two assailants fleeing the scene on foot, and more footage is being collected and analysed. Tejgaon police, along with DB and Rab, are jointly working to identify and arrest the suspects.

Hailing from Shariatpur, Musabbir was the eldest among three siblings. His family lives on Garden Road of West