

# 'ALO'

## Prothom Alo's artistic, powerful response to violence against press freedom



PHOTOS: ABRAR FAIYAZ NILOY

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Freedom of expression, enshrined in UN human rights instruments, UNESCO declarations, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, remains a cornerstone of democratic societies. It ensures that journalists can report facts, hold authority to

artist Mahbubur Rahman's reflections on destruction, memory and resilience, transforming the damaged space into a site of introspection and dialogue.

On December 18, 2025, that risk became visible when the Prothom Alo office in Dhaka was attacked. A large group of individuals reportedly descended on the premises, causing extensive

described feeling overwhelmed by what he saw; charred walls, damaged rooms and fragments of what once sustained daily work.

Burnt books were later displayed in a transparent case inside a partially intact room. Beyond it, blackened remnants filled the space, suggesting both loss and continuity. One installation features a steel lock marked

original form. Yet the exhibition resists framing them solely as ruins. Instead, it poses a quiet question: how can such a space regain balance? How can light re-enter darkness?

In one installation, pigeons move freely across a fire-damaged floor, navigating desks and scattered remnants. Their presence suggests continuity amid disruption, a living counterpoint to destruction.

Throughout the exhibition, Rahman juxtaposes fragility and persistence, stillness and motion, absence and presence. The burnt fragments serve as evidence of violence, but also of survival. Even in a damaged space, traces of life remain.

In the artist's words, "If this spontaneous yet carefully composed arrangement can offer even a fleeting moment of introspection, inviting us to reflect both on ourselves and the world around us. I will be satisfied."

It is often easy to dismiss something as propaganda when it challenges one's perception of the news. In moments of violence, when aggression overtakes dialogue and force seeks to silence expression, the strength of the pen may appear to falter. Yet, it rarely does so for long. Within 17 hours of the attack, Prothom Alo resumed operations, its online platforms restored, a reminder that institutions built on reporting and documentation persist, even under immense pressure.



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account, and document history as it unfolds. Though protected by law, these rights are often taken for granted. Journalism, in its pursuit of truth, continues to carry inherent risk.

In response to the recent violent attack on December 18, Prothom Alo organised an art initiative built around its scorched premises. Titled *Alo*, the exhibition brings together

damage to the building. Furniture, books and equipment were thrown from upper floors and set on fire outside. Law enforcement officers faced threats, and those attempting to document the incident encountered intimidation.

Soon after, the Daily Star premises were also targeted.

Entering the burnt structure for the first time, Mahbubur Rahman

with footprints; a stark symbol of forced entry. Another binds together surviving books under the inscription: "Ei mohashagore snan kore jagore" (Awaken and bathe in this great ocean), underscoring knowledge as a force that endures beyond violence.

Objects warped by fire, once functional and purposeful, now stand altered, stripped of their



## NEWS

### 13th JS convenes on March 12

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on convening the session would be sent from the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat to the president through the Prime Minister's Office.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin will convene the session in line with the Constitution.

The 13th parliament will have to go into its maiden session within 30 days of the oath-taking of the newly elected MPs, according to sources at the parliament secretariat.

As Speaker of the 12th parliament Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury has reportedly resigned, a senior BNP leader will preside over the first sitting, an official of the parliament secretariat said.

Immediately after the House goes into its maiden sitting, the Speaker and deputy Speaker will be elected and sworn in by the president.

After their election, the session is likely to be adjourned for 15 to 20 minutes for oath-taking.

The new Speaker will then preside over the House session.

The Business Advisory Committee of the new parliament will also be formed at the first sitting, with the new Speaker as its head.

The committee will decide the tenure of the inaugural session and other business of parliament.

The main task of the treasury bench on the first sitting will be to place those ordinances before the

House which the government wants to turn into law.

The interim government promulgated or amended a total of 130 ordinances during its 18-month tenure.

The standing committees on different ministries are likely to be formed during this session.

At the first sitting, the House will also adopt an obituary motion.

The current parliament was formed through the February 12 national election in which the BNP-led alliance secured 212 seats, while BNP alone won 209 seats.

The Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance bagged 76 seats, with Jamaat securing 68.

### Students, staff allege sexual abuse

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Contacted, Foyzur yesterday told The Daily Star that the committee had recorded statements of another seven students, one guardian, and seven to eight teachers of the school so far, and all of them substantiated the allegations against the headmaster.

He also said that the accused headmaster appeared before the committee on February 17.

"He, however, refuted all the allegations, terming them a conspiracy against him," Foyzur said, adding that the committee will submit its report next week.

Earlier, on February 10, the accused headmaster told The Daily Star over the phone that he was busy and would call back later. However, he has not responded to repeated phone calls since then.

Shah Mohammad Rezaul Karim, assistant headmaster of the school, on February 16 said the headmaster has been absent since February 10 and has not delegated any responsibilities

during his absence.

He said he heard some students had filed complaints with the DC but was unaware of the details.

The issue came up on February 10 when four to five alleged victims and their guardians approached a local human rights organisation with the allegations of sexual assault by the headmaster.

Human rights activist Dow Nai Pru Neli said they took the victims to the deputy commissioner's office, where a written complaint was submitted.

The Daily Star talked to a number of complainants and their family members, who alleged that the headmaster exploited poor and vulnerable students by misusing his power.

An eighth-grade student, requesting anonymity, alleged that he was called to the headmaster's room where he was sexually assaulted. Out of fear and shame, he initially kept silent but later informed his grandmother and a local human rights activist before filing a

written complaint with the district administration.

A ninth-grade student made similar allegations, adding that at least 15-20 other students may have suffered similar abuse.

One guardian alleged that after his son failed eighth grade and was readmitted, the headmaster offered to "guide" him privately and asked him to attend evening sessions. Months later, the boy refused to visit the headmaster and displayed signs of fear before eventually disclosing the alleged abuse.

A temporary computer operator alleged that he was called to the headmaster's room after office hours and was subjected to forced inappropriate conduct. He claimed he was threatened with dismissal if he resisted.

Muhammad Faridul Alam Hossaini, deputy director of secondary and higher education for the Chattogram region, said his office had not yet received any formal complaint. He also said the headmaster had not applied for leave.

### India ready for people-centric cooperation

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Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Verma at the Secretariat yesterday.

On the same day, Khalilur also met Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka Yao Wen, after which Wen told journalists that any attempt to undermine Sino-Bangla ties was "doomed to fail".

In a statement, the foreign ministry said Khalilur has indicated Bangladesh's intent to build a "forward-looking and balanced partnership" with India based on mutual interests for the benefit of the people of the two countries.

Meanwhile, Verma expressed India's readiness to work closely with the new government to further advance bilateral cooperation and make it more people-centric. The two sides agreed to maintain regular and constructive engagement to further strengthen the bilateral relationship.

The Indian envoy also extended an invitation to Khalilur from Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to undertake an official visit to New Delhi at an early date, the statement added.

The India-Bangladesh relations have been strained since the ouster of the Awami League regime through a mass uprising on August 5, 2024, when the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled and took shelter in New Delhi.

Talking to the media after the first meeting with Foreign Minister Khalilur and State Minister Shama Obaed Islam, Verma said India wants to work together in a positive, constructive, and forward-looking manner based on mutual benefits and mutual interests

and emphasised people-to-people exchanges as a vital part of bilateral relations.

After the February 12 polls, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, made a phone call, and sent him a letter that was handed over by Indian Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who attended the oath-taking ceremony of the new cabinet on February 17.

"In all these communications, we expressed our desire to build on our historic ties with Bangladesh and strengthen our multifaceted bilateral relations. We also conveyed our commitment to support democratic, progressive, and inclusive Bangladesh," Verma said.

Asked about resuming tourist visas for Bangladeshis, the diplomat said the matter fell under the broader goal of enhancing people-to-people cooperation.

On Friday, all Bangladesh missions in India resumed visa services, after the services were largely suspended in the face of demonstrations in various parts of India in late December.

Earlier yesterday, Chinese Ambassador in Bangladesh Yao Wen said Chinese cooperation with Bangladesh or any other South Asian country is not targeted at any third country and should not be affected by any foreign country.

"So, any attempt to undermine our cooperation with Bangladesh, or any South Asian country, is doomed to fail," he told journalists after separate meetings with Khalilur Rahman and State Minister Shama Obaed Islam at the foreign ministry.

In a recent media interaction, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent Christensen expressed concerns over expanding Chinese influence in South Asia, including Bangladesh, emphasising the importance of clearly communicating the risks of engaging with China in specific sectors if Bangladesh chooses to pursue that direction.

Speaking to media, Wen said Chinese cooperation with Bangladesh and other South Asian countries is meant to benefit the people of the region.

He added that China supports the new government under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in ensuring smooth governance.

"China supports Bangladesh in maintaining solidarity and stability and in safeguarding national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity," he said, adding that his country appreciates Bangladesh for pursuing its "Bangladesh First" policy and stands ready to carry forward cooperation in all sectors with the new government and jointly write new chapters in bilateral ties.

During the meeting, Foreign Minister Khalilur underscored the importance of advancing the Bangladesh-China Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

He also called for enhanced Chinese engagement with all relevant stakeholders for the early repatriation of the Rohingyas.

Ambassador Wen conveyed an invitation from the Chinese foreign minister for Khalilur to undertake an official visit to China at a mutually convenient time.

### Man called out of his home

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As part of the drama, the killer forcibly took two pedestrians hostage, tied their hands and legs, and left them in the same tobacco field, the OC said.

Arif later rushed to the neighbourhood and informed locals that a robbery had taken place but he managed to escape.

Locals rushed to the spot, rescued the three and sent them to the hospital, where the doctors declared

Mujib dead.

The injured people are Md. Mozammel, 45, of the same area, and Mohammad Khorshed, 40, of the Lotoni area.

Both are undergoing treatment at Chakaria Upazila Health Complex.

An inquest report has been prepared and no visible injury marks were found on the body. Police initially believed Mujib was killed by strangulation, the OC said.

Asked, the OC did not clarify whether Arif was alone in the killing mission or whether several others were in it.

"Police detained Arif to interrogate -- we are still investigating it," the OC said.

There had been a prior dispute between Arif and Mujib, during which Arif lost a finger. Although the two appeared to have reconciled, police suspect the killing was carried out in a planned manner.

### Pakistan air strikes kill 18

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AFP on condition of anonymity.

Islamabad said its military targeted the Pakistani Taliban and its associates, as well as an affiliate of the Islamic State group, an information ministry statement said.

Afghan authorities have previously denied harbouring militants.

Taliban government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said "people's homes have been destroyed, they have targeted civilians, they have committed this criminal act" with the bombardment of eastern Nangarhar and Paktika provinces.

Residents from around the remote Bihud district in Nangarhar joined searchers to look for bodies under the rubble using shovels and a digger, an

AFP journalist said.

"People here are ordinary people. The residents of this village are our relatives. When the bombing happened, one person who survived was shouting for help," said neighbour Amin Gul Amin, 37.

Nangarhar police told AFP the bombardment started at around midnight and hit three districts, with those killed all in a civilian's house.

"Twenty-three members of his family were buried under the rubble, of whom 18 were killed and five wounded," said police spokesperson Sayed Tayyeb Hamad.

Strikes elsewhere in Nangarhar wounded two others, while in Paktika, an AFP journalist saw a destroyed guesthouse but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

### Lt General Mainur

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promoted to major general and moved from the Army Headquarters to the DGFH headquarters.

Current DGFH Director General Maj Gen Mohammad Jahangir Alam has also been transferred to the foreign ministry.

Brig Gen Md Hafizur Rahman, currently serving as defence adviser at the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi, has been promoted to major general and appointed GOC of the 55 Infantry Division in Jashore.

Maj Gen JM Emdadul Islam, who is now leading the 55 Infantry Division, has been transferred as commandant of the East Bengal Regimental Centre. The current commandant, Maj Gen Ferdous Hasan, has been appointed GOC of the 24 Infantry Division.