

NEWS

Mob attacks on Star, Prothom Alo scripted

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on social media and over 20 hours of coordinated violence across four locations, the responses from Bangladesh law enforcement and Meta came largely after the fact.

Speaking to The Daily Star in January, AHM Shahadat Hossain, additional inspector general (Media and Public Relations) at Police Headquarters, said, "Almost all major police units monitor social media to identify provocative or instigating posts that could undermine law and order or disrupt communal harmony."

However, senior law enforcement sources said the police cyber wing lacks macro-monitoring tools and, in practice, monitors social media much like an ordinary user. Their capacity is largely limited to manual browsing, making it difficult to detect coordinated spikes in harmful content.

In a statement on December 23, Irene Khan, UN special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, wrote, "When hate speech and smear campaigns endanger the safety of media outlets, journalists,

interim government's failure to address impunity and uphold media and artistic freedom."

As violence unfolded, the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) reported 165 pieces of content to social media platforms from December 18 midnight through December 19, it told The Daily Star.

It added that many posts were reported for removal in the early hours of December 19 and that it held an online meeting with senior Facebook officials the same day, urging the platform to remove or block harmful content in the interest of public safety.

"When hate speech and smear campaigns endanger the safety of media outlets, journalists, artists and civil society leaders -- and no corrective action is taken by government or platforms -- it is only a matter of time before words translate into violence," said Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression.

and civil sources", Meta did not cooperate in deactivating accounts that were inciting and mobilising violence, and that "multiple urgent requests" had not received timely responses.

Meta did not respond to The Daily Star's request for comments.

Around the same time, the BTRC wrote to Meta, Shafiqul Alam, the then press secretary to chief adviser of the interim government, posted on Facebook acknowledging the state's failure to act.

"Last night, I received frantic, tear-choked calls for help from my journalist friends at The Daily Star and Prothom Alo. I made scores of

action, it might have escalated into live fire, they would have retaliated and attacked the police force. I don't know what intentions they had that night -- if two or four of my men were killed that night....

"You know that the police force

suffered a trauma just a year ago and we had to work to bring them to their current state. The election is ahead and if there were any police casualties, I would not be able to proceed [into the election] with them."

He added, "The fact that no human life was lost in such a major incident is what we see as our achievement."

DMP Commissioner Sheikh Md Sazzat Ali did not respond to our requests for comments for this story.

Asked about the police response at a press conference on February 9, he said, "The attack on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo happened at 11:00pm. However, due to traffic congestion, I could not send my officers there on time. If there hadn't been a traffic jam, we could have arrived much sooner."

The now-former home adviser, Lt Gen (ret'd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, could not be reached even after several attempts. The Daily Star called and texted him in early February 2026.

META'S POLICY VIOLATION

All of the social media content analysed in this investigation breached Meta's Community Standards on violence and incitement, particularly posts that identified specific targets and instructed mobs to attack them.

Meta's own policy states: "We aim to prevent potential offline harm that may be related to content on Facebook... We remove language that incites or facilitates serious violence." It further says the company removes content and disables accounts when it believes there is "a genuine risk of physical harm or direct threats to public safety," and that it assesses language and context to distinguish casual statements from credible threats.

Despite this, a substantial portion of the analysed posts from December 15 to 19 were still accessible in late January, more than a month after the attacks.

Meta did remove the Facebook page of influencer Elias Hossain on the afternoon of December 19, 2025, several hours before the BTRC sent its formal letter to the company, but more than 12 hours after the offices of Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Chhayanaut had already been vandalised, looted and set on fire.

METHODOLOGY

Facebook posts from December 13-19, 2025, were collected by searching keywords such as Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Delhi Star, Prothomalo, Chhayanaut and Udichi both during and in the aftermath of the attacks. The analysis then focused on posts that sought to legitimise attacks on these four institutions, explicitly called for such attacks, or mocked or celebrated the attacks in the aftermath.

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Protesters gather at Shabagh on the night of December 18, 2025.

PHOTO: STAR

artists and civil society leaders -- and no corrective action is taken by government or platforms -- it is only a matter of time before words translate into violence.

"The mob attacks [on Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Chhayanaut and Udichi] did not emerge in a vacuum but are the consequences of the

At 7:13pm on December 19, about 20 hours after the first attacks began, the BTRC sent an urgent letter to Meta warning that online support for Hadi's death and calls for violence against media institutions were escalating.

The regulator said that despite "repeated requests from government

calls to the right people, trying to mobilise help, but it did not arrive in time," he wrote, adding, "I am deeply sorry that I failed you."

On December 22, four days after the attacks, SN Nazrul Islam, additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, briefed the media for the first time. "If we had gone into

New ICT chief prosecutor vows sincerity

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follow legal procedures and would not be driven by political motives or personal vendettas. "Those who have not committed wrongdoings will not face harassment. But for the real perpetrators, the message is equally clear; they will get the punishment they deserve."

Rejecting any notion of political influence, Aminul said the tribunal operates solely under the law. "There cannot be any directives beyond the law. Any such directive will not be acceptable during my tenure," he said, responding to questions about whether the government has given him any specific instructions regarding the trials.

Asked about perceptions that, as a lawyer perceived to be aligned with BNP, his appointment might slow proceedings or favour members of the Awami League, Aminul dismissed the concern.

"Under a party-backed government focused on accelerating national progress, the pace of judicial proceedings should increase, not slow down," he said, adding that

the tribunal's work would continue without bias.

He also pledged continuity, saying that he would follow the approach of the previous prosecution team while working to improve efficiency. "I will apply all my skills and knowledge to manage these cases more effectively," he said, seeking cooperation from all stakeholders.

Outgoing chief prosecutor Tajul expressed confidence that the trials over crimes against humanity committed during the July uprising would continue smoothly under Aminul's leadership.

"I hope that under the new chief prosecutor, the tribunal will continue the trials properly," Tajul said, adding that there was no cause for concern over the continuity of proceedings.

A journalist asked, "You earlier mentioned that the law minister gave a green signal and that the government has goodwill. We understand you may have had meetings. Can you elaborate on this?"

Tajul replied, "Initially, we were told by the government that we should continue as we are, and

we acted on that understanding. Then, yesterday [Sunday], I was informed that the government wishes to replace someone here. I asked if they wanted me to resign voluntarily, and I was told no, that it was unnecessary.

"The idea was that, through a natural process, when someone is replaced, I would step aside at that time. There was no need for an unnecessary resignation. I felt that resigning at this stage would not be justified."

"...There is no need to resign. A resignation could have sent a different message, which is why I considered it appropriate to continue until the formal replacement," Tajul said.

Tajul formally handed over the charge to Aminul at the Chief Prosecutor's Office around 2:15pm, exchanging greetings and presenting him with flowers.

Aminul, in turn, praised Tajul's contributions, saying he would be remembered by the nation for his role, and expressed hope for continued unity in meeting public expectations.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROTOCOL TOOK BACK SEAT

The Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB) provides a "ladder of force," outlining the steps for managing public disorder. Under this legal framework, police are required to escalate force incrementally.

- 1 Police or a magistrate must declare the assembly "unlawful" and issue a clear warning to disperse.
- 2 Police should attempt to contain the crowd by forming a barrier between them and their intended target by standing in a cordon or using water cannons.
- 3 If barriers are breached, the police are allowed to resort to baton-charging. The protocol dictates targeting the lower body to minimise life-threatening injuries.
- 4 If batons fail to disperse the mob, the next step involves firing teargas or rubber bullets.
- 5 When all four steps fail, police can use lethal weapons, but only at specific targets and below the waist.

VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAWS

The UN Rabat Plan of Action, an international human rights framework, is often used to assess when speech qualifies as incitement to violence. It identifies six indicators for determining incitement: context, the speaker's position and influence, intent, the nature of the content, its extent, and the likelihood of resulting harm.

- » All six indicators were strongly present in the case of the attack on Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Chhayanaut and Udichi.
- » The context involved political tension, public emotion over a potential candidate's death, and a long running anti media narrative.
- » The content was disseminated by influencers with large followings, content creators, political activists, and satirical pages - actors capable of shaping crowds and behaviour.
- » The intent was explicit: the posts used immediate, instructional language such as "tonight itself," "right now," and "if you miss the target you will regret it."
- » The nature and extent of the content heightened the risk, as posts named specific institutions and locations making real world violence more likely.
- » The scale of dissemination was also significant: hundreds of posts within hours, live broadcasts during the attacks, real time incitement, and celebratory content immediately afterward.
- » All this underscored both the severity of the violence and the magnitude of potential harm.

ICT prosecutor alleges corruption against

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case, in which law enforcers opened fire on protesters, killing at least six people. Sultan claimed that despite a video clip showing Sub-Inspector Ashrafal instructing others to open fire, he was made a witness instead of an accused. "I have that video. Anyone can see it if needed," he said.

He further questioned why Assistant Police Commissioner Al Imran Hossain was reportedly relieved from the Abu Sayed killing case in Rangpur, alleging that several witnesses had mentioned Imran's name before the court.

Sultan also alleged that former IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun was made a state witness without justification. "Under his direct instructions, his force emptied the laps of hundreds of mothers," he said. "Not only IGP Mamun, but in the Ashulia case, Abzal was also made a state witness in exchange for money. A syndicate of three or four people

has been involved in this cycle from the beginning," he alleged.

He further claimed that "Tajul and Shishir Monir's syndicate" allowed notorious police officers, including the IGP, to evade trial and turned the chief prosecutor's office into a money-making tool.

"Are these not acts of corruption? Is this not a betrayal of the blood of the martyrs?" he asked.

When asked about the allegations at a press conference yesterday, Tajul Islam said, "These are personal allegations, of which I have no knowledge. We have investigated such claims, and they are completely false. It is unfortunate if anyone spreads such stories out of personal malice."

"The tribunal's proceedings have been fully transparent and proven in court. Anyone making false accusations with dishonest intent should remember that the entire nation, along with the media, has witnessed how transparently the

trials have been conducted," he added.

Prosecutor Gazi Monwar Hossain Tamim told The Daily Star, "These allegations have been made against me out of personal malice. I serve as a prosecutor administrator, and many people visit my office every day. I firmly state that no one can prove any accusation against me."

Supreme Court lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir expressed surprise at the allegations, calling them "incredible and whimsical, based on surmise and conjecture."

"If my learned friend has any credible information, he can disclose it to the public. I am always ready to face any credible allegation," he said.

Asked whether he would investigate the corruption allegations, newly appointed Chief Prosecutor Aminul Islam said he would act if he received a formal complaint.

"Today is not the day for such queries," he said.

Key Maoist guerrilla surrenders: India

AFP, New Delhi

Indian government officials have said the surrender of a senior Maoist guerrilla commander heralds the "final phase" to end the decades-long Maoist insurgency.

New Delhi has launched an all-out campaign against the insurgents, also known as Naxalites after the village in the Himalayan foothills where the Maoist-inspired insurgency began nearly six decades ago, and vowed to end the rebellion by the end of March.

Maoist commander Thippiri Tirupati, also known as Devji, had been active for years in Chattisgarh state.

"This is the final phase," Chattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said in a statement posted on social media late Sunday. "It marks a powerful step towards the complete eradication of armed Naxalism."

The Naxalite rebellion once held sway across nearly a third of the country, with an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 fighters at its peak in the mid-

2000s, but it has been dramatically weakened in recent years.

More than 10,000 people have died in the insurgency.

The Maoists say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised indigenous people in forest regions, where mining companies also eye valuable resources.

Since 2024, more than 500 Maoist rebels have been killed, including some of the top commanders, according to government figures.

Home Minister Amit Shah has repeatedly vowed to crush the rebels.



A trailer carries an armoured US military vehicle as American troops head toward the Iraqi Kurdistan region, withdrawing from the Qasrak military base in northeastern Syria, near Qamishli, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS