

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION US extradites Bangladeshi from Malaysia

STAR REPORT

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has secured the extradition of a Bangladeshi national from Malaysia after arresting him with the assistance of Malaysian authorities.

FBI Director Kash Patel confirmed that Zobaidul Amin, 28, accused of operating an international child sexual exploitation enterprise and wanted since 2022, was flown to the United States and arrived in Alaska on Thursday.

He was expected to be formally charged yesterday, according to Malaysian newspaper Free Malaysia.

Patel expressed gratitude to Malaysian authorities for their cooperation, saying, “Thank you to our Kuala Lumpur office, the government of Malaysia, and our great local partners all over the country who assisted with the investigation and arrest.”

In a post on X, Patel shared images appearing to show three FBI officers escorting the suspect to a private jet on a runway in Malaysia.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike in Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

War enters ‘next phase’

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and over Tehran is about to surge dramatically”.

A day earlier, Hegseth said the US was “accelerating, not decelerating” its war on Iran, with more assets heading to the region.

“There will be no deal with Iran except UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER!” Trump wrote on Truth social media.

“After that, and the selection of a GREAT & ACCEPTABLE Leader(s), we, and many of our wonderful and very brave allies and partners, will work tirelessly to bring Iran back from the brink of destruction, making it economically bigger, better, and stronger than ever before.”

Trump made the remarks just hours after Iran's president announced that unspecified countries had begun mediation efforts, one of the first signals of any diplomatic initiative to end the conflict.

On Thursday, Trump said it would be a “waste of time” to send ground troops into Iran, but he has insisted he would “have to be involved” in choosing Iran's next leader.

Trump also indicated he is keen to see Iran's leadership structure removed and that “we want to go in and clean out everything” quickly.

“We don't want someone who would rebuild over a 10-year period,” he said. He added that he had ideas for a new leader but declined to name anyone.

The war, now in its seventh day, has dragged in global powers, upended the world's energy and transport sectors, and brought chaos to even usually peaceful areas of the volatile region.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday condemned “unlawful attacks” across the Middle East and warned that the situation could spiral out of control.

“All the unlawful attacks in the Middle East and beyond are causing tremendous suffering and harm to civilians throughout the region – and pose a grave a risk to the global economy, particularly to the most vulnerable people,” he said.

“The situation could spiral beyond anyone's control. It is time to stop the fighting and get to serious diplomatic

negotiations.”

On the ground, Israel pursued a major expansion of the war in Lebanon, pounding the capital, Beirut, after ordering an unprecedented evacuation of the entire southern suburbs of the city.

It also launched a new wave of attacks on Iran, saying 50 of its warplanes had struck a bunker still being used by Iran's leadership beneath Khamenei's destroyed Tehran compound.

On Thursday, Israel's military chief Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir said that more than 60 percent of Iran's ballistic missile launchers and 80 percent of its air-defence systems have been destroyed.

The US military said it has sunk over 30 Iranian ships, including an Iranian drone ship. US Admiral Brad Cooper, who leads US forces in the Middle East as the head of Central Command, told reporters that ballistic missile attacks by Iran have decreased by 90 percent.

According to the Iranian Red Crescent Society, US and Israeli strikes on the country have killed 1,230 people since the beginning of the war on February 28, a number AFP, Reuters could not independently verify. The Lebanese health ministry has reported 123 people killed and 683 wounded as a result of Israeli attacks.

In Israel, at least 10 people have been killed, according to first responders there. The US military has reported the deaths of six of its personnel.

In Lebanon, Israel struck several towns in the south of the country overnight, with widespread destruction in the southern Beirut suburbs, considered a Hezbollah stronghold and home to hundreds of thousands of people.

AFP TV cameras captured a fresh strike on the area yesterday, footage showing plumes of smoke billowing from buildings.

Iran also kept up its attacks on Israel, with a volley of missiles aimed at Tel Aviv while rocket trails also lit up the sky in Netanya, further north. AFP journalists in Tel Aviv reported hearing several blasts over the city after the military said it detected launches from Iran.

The UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia all reported fresh drone and missile attacks.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday said their forces had targeted radar systems in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar.

“US THAAD radars deployed in the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, as well as the US FPS-132 over the horizon radar (Desert Eye) stationed in Qatar, have been destroyed by the missile and drone units of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),” said the Guards on their website Sepah News.

It also said it targeted US forces at two military bases in the Gulf – al-Dhafra airbase in the UAE and Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait. No immediate details were provided about possible damage or casualties.

The Iranian army yesterday claimed that they attacked a “US-owned” oil tanker off the coast of Kuwait, setting it on fire, reported Al Jazeera.

Qatar, without specifying any base, said it intercepted a drone attack on a US air base on its territory early yesterday, while Saudi Arabia said it shot down three drones east of its capital. The UAE said it intercepted 9 ballistic missiles and 109 drones fired by Iranian forces.

Thirteen people, seven of them civilians, have been killed in Gulf countries since the war began.

The conflict has expanded as far afield as the Sri Lankan coast, where a US submarine torpedoed an Iranian frigate, and Azerbaijan, which threatened retaliation after a drone hit an airport.

Meanwhile, an Iranian warship has docked in the southwest Indian port of Kochi.

“IRIS Lavan... docked at Kochi on March 4. In this context, its crew of 183 are currently accommodated at naval facilities in Kochi,” said an Indian government source.

Like the IRIS Dena, the Iranian warship sunk by a US submarine Wednesday off the coast of Sri Lanka, IRIS Lavan had also been part of a naval fleet review off India's port city of Visakhapatnam.

Meanwhile, after the Senate, the US House of Representatives rejected an effort on Thursday to stop Trump's air war on Iran.

The day the nation held its breath

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March 1971, the non-cooperation movement had reached its peak, defying repeated attempts by the army to suppress it, including firing on protesters.

In effect, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had already emerged as the de facto leader of Bangladesh, commanding the loyalty of millions. Against this charged backdrop, he was scheduled to address a rally on March 7.

The nation waited, breath held in collective suspense. Would he declare independence and sever ties with West Pakistan once and for all? Would this be the moment?

It had been known since March 1 that Bangabandhu would outline the future course of action at the March 7 rally. Soon after, it was announced that President Yahya Khan would address the nation on March 6, wrote Archer K Blood, then US consul general in erstwhile East Pakistan, in his book “The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat”.

“This coming conjunction gave rise to much anxiety, hope and speculation in East Pakistan. The key question debated was whether or not Mujib would use the occasion to declare the independence of Bangladesh, and, if so, how would the army react,” he added.

Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, then commander of the 14th Division in East Pakistan, recalled the tense hours in his book “A Stranger in My Own Country”. On the eve of March 7, two East Pakistani gentlemen met him, introducing themselves as Mujib's emissaries.

Raja wrote that he issued a stern warning.

In case Mujib attacked the integrity

of the country and proclaimed independence unilaterally, “I told the emissaries to inform Sheikh Mujib that, during his speech, I would have the army – armed with guns and tanks – standing by in the cantonment, ready to move immediately,” he wrote.

“I would have the army march in immediately with orders to wreck the meeting and, if necessary, raze Dhaka to the ground.”

Scientist MA Wazed Miah, in his book “Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Ke Ghire Kichhu Ghotona O Bangladesh”, described a different scene unfolding that morning.

Bangabandhu's residence at Dhanmondi 32 was packed with leaders and activists of the Awami League and others from early morning. Inside, Bangabandhu sat with party leaders in a closed door meeting. After lengthy discussions, he emerged to say they had reached a consensus: a four-point declaration would be made at the afternoon rally.

The declaration, he said, would reflect the political reality of the time and the demands raised by students and the people. It would call for an end to martial law and the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people, among other demands. The statement would be released to the press after the rally.

Wazed Miah, the husband of Bangabandhu's eldest daughter Sheikh Hasina, wrote that Bangabandhu later set out for the Ramna Race Course, now Suhrawardy Udyan, standing on a truck alongside Awami League leaders. A boat-shaped stage had been erected at the venue. As he arrived, the vast crowd roared with slogans.

But the sea of voices fell silent the

moment Bangabandhu rose to speak.

Emotion choking his voice, the towering orator began: “I have come before you today with a heart laden with sadness...”

In the 19-minute speech that followed, he recounted how Bangladesh had been denied their democratic rights despite securing a majority in the election. He called on people from all walks of life to prepare for resistance against tyranny, exploitation, subjugation, and deprivation by the Pakistani military junta, urging them to turn every home into a fortress.

He also laid out detailed instructions for how the country would be run under the ongoing non-cooperation movement.

Then came the thunderous crescendo: “The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla.”

The crowd raised their hands in unison, pledging solidarity with the call.

The speech stirred a nation, inspiring millions to prepare for the Liberation War that began weeks later, when the Pakistani military launched a brutal crackdown on the night of March 25, attacking unarmed Bangladeshes and unleashing a genocide that would continue for nine months.

Reflecting on the moment, Archer Blood later wrote, “Mujib's speech on March 7 was more notable for what he did not say than for what he actually said. He did not, as some feared and some hoped, declare an independent Bangla Desh. Instead, he called for a peaceful, non-cooperation movement to continue the struggle for independence and emancipation of Bengalis.”

City

Negligence fuels surge in gas-related fires

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Similarly, fire incidents related to gas pipeline leaks rose to 562 last year from 465 in 2024, marking a 21 percent increase, the data show.

Experts from the Fire Service and Civil Defence and the Department of Explosives said that when gas leaks and accumulates inside a room or a closed space without proper ventilation, it creates ideal conditions for an explosion.

Fire officials said an explosion can occur if gas concentration in a confined space is between five and 15 percent.

Gas can build up from a tiny leak in a pipeline or from a loose LPG cylinder regulator that controls the flow of gas. Besides, gas generated in sewerage lines or septic tanks can accumulate in toilets, they said.

Many of the gas explosions occur on the ground floor of buildings, as gas leaked from pipelines or sewerage lines gets trapped there over time.

The built-up gas causes an explosion when it comes in contact with a spark from an electrical short circuit or when someone lights a matchstick, said Brig Gen (ret'd) Ali Ahmed Khan, former director general of the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

He, however, said the likelihood of an explosion from a pipeline leak drops sharply if the trapped gas can escape into open space.

Ahmed blamed weak regulatory oversight, negligence by gas distributors, including Titas Gas, and a lack of public awareness for such fire incidents.

More than one crore consumers – including households, restaurants and industrial units – rely on gas cylinders, while around 38 lakh households use pipeline gas supplied by state-run distributors across the country.

Blaming most of the gas cylinder-related explosions on illegal refilling, Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh, said that nearly 95 percent of such incidents are linked to cross-filling of LPG cylinders outside authorised plants.

“At licensed LPG plants, cylinders are filled following proper procedures.

But when those are refilled manually at unauthorised facilities, safety standards are not maintained, which significantly raises the risk of explosion.”

He further said that in many cases, illegal operators underfill cylinders or mix other substances with gas, compromising safety.

“It will be extremely difficult to check gas cylinder-related blasts unless illegal refilling is stopped,” he added.

Experts noted that many users hire inexperienced or untrained technicians to connect their stoves to gas cylinders or household pipelines, which can result in faulty installations.

Besides, low-quality pipes and regulators are sometimes used during stove installations, increasing the likelihood of gas leaks.

FINGERS POINTED AT TITAS GAS

Many consumers allege that state-run Titas Gas, which supplies gas to 27.58 lakh households across 12 districts including Dhaka, has been negligent in maintaining and repairing its ageing pipelines and in disconnecting illegal gas lines. There have also been claims that Titas staffers do not immediately respond to complaints.

One of the major gas explosions involving a Titas pipeline occurred at a Narayanganj mosque on the night of September 4, 2020. At least 34 people were killed.

At that time, fire officials said the explosion was caused by an accumulation of leaked gas from an underground Titas pipeline that somehow came in contact with an electric spark.

Titas Gas had suspended eight officials and staffers in connection with the blast.

There was another big gas explosion in Moghbazar on June 27, 2021, which left 12 people dead and 50 others injured. The blast triggered partial collapse of a building and shattered the glass walls of dozens of nearby structures.

A fire service investigation later found that the explosion resulted from the accumulation of a huge amount of methane gas from leaks in a Titas Gas

AL leader dies within 40 minutes of release on bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Panchagarh

An Awami League leader, who was in Panchagarh Jail, died in a hospital shortly after being released on bail.

Harunur Rashid, 55, was hospitalised after falling ill on Wednesday. He died in ICU of Dinaajpur Medical College Hospital on Thursday, Jailer Akherul Islam of Panchagarh Jail told The Daily Star.

According to prison and hospital sources, the prison authorities received the bail order around 3:30pm on Thursday. At 3:40pm, the order was sent to the hospital via email. At 4:08pm, doctors declared Harun dead.

Harun was a former member of Panchagarh Zilla Parishad and ex-organising secretary of Debiganj upazila unit AL.

According to prison sources, Harun was arrested on October 16 last year in a case filed under the Negotiable Instruments (NI) Act. He was sentenced to one year of simple imprisonment. Another case had also been filed against him.

Jailer Akherul said Harun received initial treatment at the prison

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pipeline and a sewerage line inside the building.

When contacted, Md Al Amin, manager of the public relations department of Titas Gas, admitted that a good number of gas explosions had occurred following leaks from their pipelines.

He, however, refuted allegations of delayed response to gas leak complaints, and said that a customer care hotline is always available and staffers work round the clock to deal with emergencies.

He also said they publish advertisements through media outlets regularly to raise public awareness.

EXPERTS' SUGGESTIONS

Several experts suggested a set of precautionary measures to keep homes safe from gas accumulation and explosion.

Ahmed said, “When a water tap starts leaking, we can easily see water dripping and fix it. But a gas leak is not visually detectable. That's why we must periodically check the building's gas lines as well as those in kitchens.”

He further said kitchen doors and windows should always be kept open so that any leaked gas can diffuse into the air instead of building up indoors.

Residents returning home after several days should not immediately switch on lights or fans; instead, they should first open doors and windows to let in fresh air to dilute built-up gas, if any, he added.

Experts also stressed the need for ensuring proper ventilation in septic tanks so that gas can escape rather than getting trapped in basements or rooms on the ground floor. These tanks should be cleaned regularly.

They advised people to turn off gas burners properly, especially before going to bed, and to immediately inform the authorities if there are any signs of leaks in gas lines.

Installation of gas detectors at homes and workplaces can provide an additional layer of safety. At the same time, the authorities should conduct regular inspections of gas and sewerage lines to detect faults early, they said.

worker, returned to Bangladesh on

February 10 and had come to visit his

sister Sonia with his family from their home in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur.

“Parts of the ground-floor and the first-floor walls had collapsed. All 10 people inside the flat suffered burn injuries,” he said, adding that they suspected the blast occurred from gas accumulation.

Resident Surgeon Shawon Bin Rahman of the burn institute said Sonia suffered 100 percent burns, while Enayet sustained 85 percent burns.

Rubel suffered 32 percent burns, Riya 32 percent, Roza 18 percent, Delwara 14 percent, Junayed 24 percent, Habib 19 percent, Ayesha 12 percent, and Abu Kalam Rubel 7 percent burns.

He added that several of the victims also sustained injuries to their airways.

All are currently undergoing treatment,

with five in critical condition.

Senior Station Officer Alam Hossain of Uttara Fire Station told The Daily Star firefighters rushed to the scene but did not have to take any action as the fire had already been extinguished.

“We suspect the explosion occurred due to accumulated gas, which damaged several flats,” he said.

Sajed said Rubel's house was entirely in ruins after the blast. As soon as he reached the hospital, he spoke to Sonia, who told him that she would not survive. Enayet told him to look after his children. He said all of them were in pain.

“We have informed our relatives. We are from a low-income background. We don't know if we can afford the medicines and treatment in the coming days,” Sajed said.

safe passage.

“UNHCR has declared the escalating crisis in the Middle East as a major humanitarian emergency requiring an immediate response across the region,” Ayaki Ito, the agency's emergency chief and its cross-regional refugee coordinator, told a press briefing in Geneva.

“The recent escalation of hostility and attacks in the Middle East have triggered significant population movements – while clashes along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan have also forced many thousands of families to flee,” he said.

The affected regions already host nearly 25 million people as refugees, internally displaced people, or refugees who have recently returned from abroad, said Ito.

‘Give peace a chance’

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His comments came as fresh strikes rocked Iran and Lebanon yesterday, with Israel vowing to escalate to a new phase in the Middle East war that has spiralled rapidly throughout the region and beyond.

The war has dragged in global powers, upended the world's energy and transport sectors, and brought chaos to even usually peaceful areas of the volatile region.

Turk voiced particular concern about the situation in Lebanon, which he said was “becoming a key flashpoint”.

“I am extremely concerned and worried about the latest developments following Hezbollah's attacks on Israel and Israel's heavy counter-strikes, as well as its extensive displacement orders that have already forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes,”

he said.

“I call for an immediate cessation of hostilities.”

The UN rights chief lamented that “confusion has also been sown around international law”, and that “some have openly derided the fundamental values of our common humanity”.

“Given the magnitude of this crisis, I call on heads of state and government around the world unequivocally to commit to defending internationally human rights law, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter itself,” he said.

“We cannot afford for more powder

kegs to ignite.”

Meanwhile, the United Nations refugee agency yesterday declared the crisis in the Middle East a major humanitarian emergency, and insisted all fleeing civilians should be granted