

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

FAKE WEBSITE France accuses Russia of election interference

AFP, Paris

French officials yesterday accused a Russian group tied to military intelligence of foreign interference after it targeted a candidate in the upcoming Paris mayoral race using a fraudulent website.

The operation against centre-right candidate Pierre-Yves Bournazel was likely conducted by the Storm-1516 network, said France's Viginum agency, which tracks foreign disinformation campaigns.

The group is suspected of being behind numerous disinformation campaigns in France, including an effort detected in February to spread false claims linking President Emmanuel Macron to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Viginum said it had identified an account on X known to engage in disinformation operations before discovering a website impersonating Bournazel's official site.

The agency said the website had been hijacked to "discredit his image", though it described the move as a "low-profile" operation that garnered fewer than 20,000 views on X, compared to a typical 100,000.

Survival odds grim

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Earlier in March last year, eight members of the same family suffered burns in a fire resulting from a gas leak in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj area. Later, four of them died from burn wounds, highlighting the high fatality rate in fires triggered by gas explosions.

That same month in 2024, at least 32 people, including women and children, were injured after a gas cylinder caught fire due to a pipe leak in Gazipur's Kaliakoir. Fourteen of them later died from their injuries.

REASONS BEHIND HIGH FATALITY

Prof Nasir Uddin, director of NIBPS, said a major reason for the high fatality rate among patients with gas-related burns is inhalation injury, meaning their airways get burnt.

Another reason is that the percentage of burns is usually much higher in such incidents, he added.

Since January last year, NIBPS has received 235 patients, who suffered burns in 60 fire incidents caused by gas leaks. The institute counted only those incidents in which at least two to 10 people were injured.

Of the 235 patients, nearly half – 117 – suffered more than 20 percent

burns to their bodies, with 71 of them having 41 to 100 percent burns.

"When a patient suffers an inhalation injury along with over 20 percent burns, the scope for intervention is extremely limited... Given our medical capability, if burns exceed 30 percent and the airway is also affected, the risk of death rises by more than 50 percent," he told The Daily Star.

Another crucial issue is the availability of medicines and equipment. In developed countries, advanced and expensive drugs are used in burn management.

"We cannot administer those medicines here due to budget constraints," he said.

Nasir further said foreign experts who visited Bangladesh after the Milestone Air crash last year recommended international-standard dressing materials, antibiotics and other essential medicines for proper treatment of burn patients.

"We have already sought additional budget allocation from the government, stressing that our institute should not be treated like other general hospitals. It should be doubled at the very least."

10 of a family burnt

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son Junayed, 10; Enayet's younger brother Habib, 26, a mason by profession; Enayet's niece Ayesha Akhter, 19; and Abu Kalam Rubel, 35.

Sajed Matobbor, Enayet's nephew and Ayesha's brother, who paints houses for a living, resides on the second floor in the same building.

At the hospital, he said there was a loud bang around 3:30am and the glass windows in his room broke. He thought there was an earthquake and went to the roof. Later, when he heard cries of "fire" and got out of the building and learned that his family members were taken to the hospital.

He said Rubel was a ride-sharing motorcyclist who lived with his family on the first floor of the building. Enayet, who works in Dubai as an expatriate 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.

'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 international 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 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.



Demonstrators attend an anti-Israeli and US rally after Friday prayer in Tehran yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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 Bangladeshis 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."