



Members of the executive committee of the Editors' Council at a meeting with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at the Secretariat yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Draft laws clip powers granted in ordinances

FROM PAGE 1
The other draft law criminalises enforced disappearances committed by state agencies, prescribing penalties from a minimum of 10 years' imprisonment to the death sentence.

It diverges from the ordinance by abolishing special tribunals for such cases and assigning investigations to the police.

The ordinance had tasked the NHRC with investigating disappearances through its own teams, explicitly barring members of a force from investigating their own agency.

The draft instead empowers police to investigate all cases and determine command responsibility.

Stakeholders said that sub-inspector-level investigators could be outranked by the very officers they are supposed to probe.

Asaduzzaman defended the provision, saying police are equipped to

investigate major crimes of all types.

He added that systemic enforced disappearances, such as those during the Awami League's tenure, would be prosecuted by the International Crimes Tribunal.

The proposed penalties also drew criticism. Stakeholders argued that a minimum sentence of 10 years could discourage law enforcers from releasing victims of short-term disappearances alive.

Short-term disappearances include detentions exceeding the 24-hour legal limit for producing arrestees before a court but not extending into months or years.

The draft law, however, expands accountability by heavily penalising civilians with superior command responsibility over forces.

Asaduzzaman described enforced disappearance as a "highly sensitive" issue requiring careful consideration.

"There are many aspects that require careful thought. It would not be right to hastily enact a law that, instead of punishing the perpetrator, inadvertently benefits them," he said.

"If a sudden decision is taken to pass a law that ends up being ineffective, allowing the culprit to escape liability or benefit from it, then such legislation will lose its purpose.

"You can rest assured that a law will be crafted in such a manner that enforced disappearances can never return to Bangladesh again," he added.

Halif Ahmed Chowdhury, secretary of the legislative and parliamentary affairs division of the law ministry, delivered the welcome address at the meeting. Attendees included Sylhet-2 MP Tahsina Rushdir, reserved seat MP and 'Mayer Daak' Coordinator Sanjida Islam Tulee, Attorney General Ruhul Quddus Kazal, and UNDP Resident Representative Stefan Liller.

Cargo exports hit

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, 400-600 tonnes of cargo are brought daily to HSI for airlifting, mainly to the EU and US. In peak seasons, the volume rises to about 1,200 tonnes a day, while in lean periods it drops to 200-250 tonnes.

Kabir urged the government to address the issue urgently as it directly affects national exports.

SM Ragib Samad, executive director of HSI, said that two of the scanners have long been beyond repair, while another developed technical faults last month.

"We are trying to repair this EDS scanner machine, and it will likely be in service by May 25," he added.

EDS screening is mandatory for cargo exports to European Union countries.

Cargo bound for non-European destinations, including the Middle East and Africa, is screened through separate "Non-RA3" scanners. Of the six such machines, three are operational, one is out of service, and two have been reported "temporarily inactive". Sector insiders said the inactive scanners are functional and can be reactivated if demand rises.

To manage the crisis, airport authorities are increasingly relying on Explosive Detection Dog (EDD) squads as an emergency alternative.

Exporters, however, have expressed concern over the prolonged

breakdown and sought urgent repairs.

Nisher Khan, chairman of the airport cell of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said, "The airport authorities have been assuring that one EDS may be repaired soon."

He added that garment exporters are rushing to ship goods ahead of Eid to ensure timely payments and meet strict lead times, as factory production will pause during the holiday.

"There is heavy pressure of waiting goods at HSI, and one scanner is not enough to complete the vital screening," Nisher said.

PM assures action on the cases

FROM PAGE 1

The Editors' Council handed over a list of 282 journalists to the prime minister, highlighting that 94 of them have been accused in murder cases.

Any specific, evidence-based allegation against a journalist must go through transparent judicial processes under existing laws, the council said.

The PM said the government intends to act as a facilitator, rather than a regulator, of the media.

He said strong media are an essential part of the state and that his government would remain committed to that principle, according to a press release signed by council President Nurul Kabir and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud.

Briefing reporters at the Secretariat after the meeting, the Editors' Council members shared details of their discussion with the prime minister.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said that while the list might not fully capture the situation and some names may have been left out, it serves as a starting point.

"We presented the list and firmly told the prime minister that filing such cases against journalists is not a good sign for a democratic country, and it also damages the government's image," Anam said.

Information and Broadcasting

Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon told reporters that the prime minister echoed the editors' concerns and had already instructed him to take the necessary steps.

According to the press release, the council told the PM that Bangladesh's media-related laws are outdated and create barriers to press freedom, undermining the country's image internationally.

In particular, Form "B" of a newspaper declaration requires publishers to pledge not to publish anything "against the interests of the government" or any "objectionable" content. This binds them to the Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act, 1973.

The Editors' Council demanded the immediate repeal of this provision, saying it contradicts the constitution and has an "undemocratic character".

The council also raised the urgent need for a media commission to pursue reforms or to strengthen the Press Council. In response, the prime minister directed the information minister to complete the relevant evaluations by June so the government could take visible steps by July, according to the press release.

The prime minister emphasised the importance of a self-regulation

framework for the media, while the council informed him of its initiative to adopt a code of conduct for journalists by July.

The Editors' Council unanimously thanked the prime minister, saying there had been no state-level intervention in media operations since the BNP-led government took office, the information minister added.

State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Yasser Khan Choudhury and the prime minister's Information Adviser Zahed Ur Rahman also attended the meeting.

Among the council's executive committee members, President and New Age Editor Nurul Kabir, Treasurer and Financial Express Editor Shamsul Huq Zahid, and General Secretary and Bonik Barta Editor Dewan Hanif Mahmud were present.

Other attendees included Prothom Alo Editor Matior Rahman, Manab Zamin Chief Editor Matior Rahman Chowdhury, Daily Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin, Karatoa Editor Md Mozammel Haque, and Suprobhat Bangladesh Editor Rusho Mahmud.

The prime minister's Press Secretary Abu Abdullah M Saleh and Additional Press Secretary Atikur Rahman Ruman were also present.

Clashes over VC appointment

FROM PAGE 1

Ten of them were released after primary treatment, while five others were undergoing treatment at the hospital, he said.

According to university sources, the government on Thursday appointed Mohammad Iqbal of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology as the new vice-chancellor of DUET.

Since then, a section of the students has been protesting against the decision. The movement began around 9:30pm on Thursday and it continued on Friday and Saturday.

The protesting students said that DUET is a specialised engineering university with academic and administrative realities different from those of other institutions. They argued that the VC should have been appointed from among the university's experienced and senior internal faculty members.

Alongside the students, several teacher leaders also demanded that the VC be appointed from among DUET's senior faculty members.

Yesterday, the students gathered on campus from around 8:00am and staged demonstrations.

Tensions escalated further after they somehow got information that the newly appointed VC might arrive on campus to assume office. At one stage, protesting students locked the university's main gate, said witnesses.

Later, around 11:00am, a group of people supporting the new VC tried to enter the campus by breaking the main gate, which eventually turned into clashes.

During the confrontation, both sides reportedly hurled bricks at each other, said witnesses.

The attackers were outsiders and

another one said they were activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the pro-BNP student body, said one of the students present during the clash.

Das, however, said the authorities could not identify the people who were outside the gate.

"We welcome the government's decision on the appointment of the new VC. We went to the campus taking the new VC with us. But we found the gate locked and a group of students resisted us," said Monirul Islam, publicity secretary of the university unit JCD.

At one stage, the students started hurling brick chunks from inside the campus at them, triggering the clash that left at least five of them injured, he told The Daily Star last night.

The JCD leader also alleged that activists of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, led the student protest and the violence.

However, Shibir, in a statement, made a counter-allegation that the BNP men, including JCD and Jubo Dal, carried out the attack on general students and demanded immediate legal action against the attackers.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shibir's university unit President Abdullah Ahad termed the student movement 'logical'.

Contacted, Mohammad Aminul Islam, the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gazipur Sadar Police Station, said police rushed to the spot on information of the violence and brought the situation under control at around 3:00pm.

Additional law enforcers were deployed in the area to avoid further violence. No case was filed as of last night, he said.

The clash has put the spotlight back on how VCs are appointed to public

universities.

Bangladesh has no uniform policy for such appointments. Only four public universities – Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar – have a formal system under the 1973 University Ordinance, which says their senates must elect VC panels.

In other public universities, the president, as chancellor, appoints VCs with the prime minister's consent.

Since assuming office in February, the BNP-led government has appointed VCs to at least 18 public universities.

In April, the education ministry reconstituted a six-member search committee to recommend names for such appointments.

Contacted, Md Faridul Islam, one of the committee members and the VC of Rajshahi University, said the committee reviewed candidates' academic experience and leadership record before recommending names.

"While recommending an individual for a university, we considered the type of university and the needs of its students. That was the basic principle."

Asked about appointing VCs to universities other than their own, he said a VC's post is not meant to be confined to any particular institution.

"It is a matter of an individual's capability, knowledge and foresight."

Asked about the DUET protest, he said students should not have been involved in such demonstrations.

A similar search committee was formed under the previous interim government, but only after top posts at most public universities had already been filled.

[Our Gazipur correspondent contributed to the report]

FROM PAGE 1

for Iran to keep only one nuclear site in operation and transfer its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to the United States.

Meanwhile, a drone strike triggered a fire near a nuclear power station in the emirate of Abu Dhabi yesterday, authorities said, reporting no injuries or impact on radiation levels.

The UAE's defence ministry said the drone that targeted the facility was one of three that "entered the country from the western border direction".

The projectile struck "an electrical generator outside the inner perimeter of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in the Al Dhafra area".

"Investigations are ongoing to determine the source of the attacks, and updates will be disclosed upon completion of the investigations," the ministry added.

UAE presidential adviser Anwar Gargash appeared to refer to Iran and its regional proxy groups in his condemnation of the attack, reports AFP.

In a statement on X on Saturday night, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf has said the world is "at the cusp of a new order", describing accelerating global transformations. Ghalibaf, who recently emerged as a chief negotiator in talks with the United States, has been appointed to oversee relations with China, Iranian media reported yesterday.

Ghalibaf has held a meeting with Pakistani Interior Minister Mohsin

Trump warns Iran of 'very bad time' without peace deal

Iran warns of readiness for war, economic costs if talks falter

US, Israel risk repeating past mistakes if war resumes: Russia

US ends temporary waiver on Russian oil sanctions

Naqvi and briefly discussed the deadlocked peace talks between the US and Iran.

He chastised "regional governments [who] thought that the presence of America would bring them security, but recent events showed that this presence not only does not bring security, but also creates insecurity", as reported by Iran's semi-official Mehr news agency.

Naqvi said Iran and Pakistan "were close to each other before, but now they are closer". He mentioned the talks that took place in Islamabad, saying that Ghalibaf "stood up for Iran's national interests in negotiations and at the

BNP to again ask opposition

FROM PAGE 1

Nurul Islam said the ruling party wanted to give priority to constitutional amendments during the upcoming budget session. "We are thinking of forming the committee during the budget session itself. I hope we will be able to complete the work of constitutional amendment by December and January."

Several ruling party MPs said informal discussions were underway on how the BNP should move forward if the opposition formally rejects the proposal.

A section of MPs said the ruling party may still form the committee with BNP lawmakers and MPs from other parties represented in

parliament.

"If the opposition does not join, then we will have to consider other partners and MPs in the House. The committee should still have contributions from several parties," said one BNP lawmaker, requesting anonymity.

He said the final decision would come from Prime Minister and BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman.

Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party have opposed joining the proposed committee and are preparing to formally convey their decision to the ruling party. They argue that constitutional reforms should be implemented through the formation of a Constitution Reform

Hijra person dies after being torched

Victim's father sues community leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A hijra individual who was set on fire allegedly by her "guruma" (community leader) in Cumilla's Burichang died under treatment yesterday.

The victim, Enamul Haque Shishir alias Mahi, had suffered severe burn injuries and died in the ICU of the National Burn Institute in Dhaka, said police.

Mahi's father, Kamrul Haque Shohag, filed a murder case with Burichang Police Station naming three, including Dhopa Hijra Dola and Guruma Zahir, and seven-eight unidentified accused, confirmed Burichang Police Station Officer-in-Charge Lutfor Rahman.

He said police have arrested Dola alias Dhopa Hijra in connection with the killing.

According to the case statement, between 9:00pm and 10:00pm on Wednesday (May 13), Guruma Zahir and associates allegedly tied up Mahi in front of their akhra (community home) at Burichang Uttar Bazar. They then poured kerosene and set Mahi on fire.

Locals rescued Mahi and first took them to Cumilla Medical College Hospital. Later, Mahi was transferred to National Burn Institute in Dhaka where they died under treatment.

The family alleged that local police were initially unwilling to accept the case.

the altercation and later died after being taken to hospital.

Mujibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said no visible injury marks were found on the woman's body in the inquest report, adding that no case was filed till the filing of this report around 8:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, police who had detained Yunus freed him yesterday.

Sabuktagin Sohel, resident medical officer of Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, said the exact cause of death would be known after the autopsy report is released.