Dhaka seeks details from Riyadh over execution of 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Bangladesh has sought detailed information from Saudi Arabia about the execution of two Bangladeshi nationals, as neither the foreign ministry nor the Bangladesh mission there was notified beforehand, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam said yesterday.

"There is no doubt that Bangladesh enjoys good relations with Saudi Arabia, especially since the new government took office," she said, adding that Dhaka was awaiting details from Riyadh.

Asked whether Saudi Arabia had

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A fruit seller in Moghbazar has installed solar panels to meet his shop's electricity needs, demonstrating how individuals can turn to renewable energy as an alternative. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh gets first woman chief information commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Prof Nahreen Islam Khan of Jahangirnagar University has been appointed the country's first woman chief information commissioner (CIC).

The president appointed the professor of the Department of Geography and Environment as CIC, while journalists SAM Mahfuzur Rahman, currently working as speech writer of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, and Khan Mohammad Abul Hossain, assistant editor of the Daily Dinkal, were appointed information commissioners.

Asked for comments on her appointment as the first female chief information commissioner, Nahreen Khan told The Daily Star yesterday, "Every initiative will be taken by this institution to protect the citizens' right to know as the owners of the state. At the same time, I thank everyone concerned for considering me worthy of heading one of the country's most important institutions."

The appointments were made under Section 15(1) of the Right to Information Act, 2009, according to two separate notifications issued by the Press-2 branch of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting yesterday.

At least 10 killed

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and other identifying features to establish their identities.

Deputy Commissioner Md Abdul Mannan of Cox's Bazar said a five-member committee had been formed to investigate the incident. DNA samples would be collected from the bodies and matched against samples from relatives before they were handed over to the families.

Seven people were taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital with burn injuries. Two were discharged after initial treatment, while five remained hospitalised, said Resident Medical Officer Sabuktagin Mahmud.

"One of the patients is in a critical condition and will be referred elsewhere," he told The Daily Star. The injured had burns covering around five percent of their bodies, he added.

The resort, beside Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Marine Drive about 40km from Cox's Bazar town, was built with concrete, wood, bamboo and tin.

One side had a brick wall, while much of the remaining structure was made of combustible materials. Staff quarters were on the ground floor.

The second floor had eight rooms, and all rooms at the resort were booked on Friday night, according to information available at the scene.

The resort had been operating without a fire safety licence despite receiving an official warning four months ago, the Fire Service and Civil Defence said.

At a press briefing at the fire service headquarters in Dhaka, its Director General Brig Gen Sultanul Afreen Junaid said an inspector had visited the resort in June and served a notice on June 11, declaring the building "hazardous".

"They [resort authorities] paid little heed to the warning and kept the business running," he said, adding that the resort was effectively operating without permission.

Fire service officials at the scene said the resort had faulty documentation, lacked adequate fire extinguishers, and had no proper firefighting arrangements.

Abdullah, a next-door neighbour, said his sister woke him around 7:00am and told him that the building was on fire.

When he went outside, he saw flames coming from the kitchen area. The reception was beside the kitchen, and the only staircase leading to the upper floors was nearby, he said.

"The fire spread within moments and flames shot into the sky. The entire resort was engulfed and burnt down in a short time. By the time the fire service arrived, much of the damage had already been done," he said.

Some people escaped by breaking windows and jumping out, while others found their way out of the burning building, he added.

Dr Shihab Uddin, a physician at Mugda Medical College Hospital, and his wife, Nafisa Newar Khan, were among those staying at the resort.

Shihab said they were asleep when heavy smoke woke them. When they tried to leave, they found the front section engulfed in flames, blocking their way out.

They managed to escape by jumping from a rear balcony, he said. Both suffered burns to their feet, but doctors told them their conditions were not critical.

Locals, Border Guard Bangladesh members and police joined firefighters in the rescue operation.

6 FAMILY MEMBERS 'MISSING'

Relatives said six members of the same family were missing.

Police and administration officials suspect they were among those killed in the fire and are yet to be identified.

The missing family members are Isra Jahan Maliha, 28, daughter of retired government official Mamunur Rashid and a resident of Dhaka's Banasree area; her sister Layla Jahan Nabila, 26, from Khilgaon; their cousin Milita Mehzabin Alvi, 23; another cousin, Fariha Kabir, 33; Fariha's five-year-old child, Faizan Ahmed; and Fariha's brother, Nafis Te Hami, 26.

Ashikur Ashikul Islam, Maliha's husband, who survived the incident, said they had checked into the resort on Thursday and were scheduled to return to Dhaka yesterday.

Nafis is a student of Dhaka University's Chinese language and culture department from the 2020-21 academic session. Nabila studies at Jagannath University, while Alvi goes to East West University.

Two women who requested anonymity at the hospital said that they had been staying at the resort with a third friend. They had gone out for a morning walk, but their friend, Nasrin Akter Mukta, 28, was still inside the resort and could not escape.

Further details about other people who remained missing were not immediately available.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister M Rashiduzzaman Millat expressed sorrow over the deaths and offered condolences to the bereaved families in a statement.

He urged the authorities concerned to continue searching for missing people, investigate the cause of the fire, and take steps to ensure tourists' safety.

He also directed the Bangladesh Tourism Board to send a team to the scene to assess the situation, determine the extent of the damage, and assist tourists affected by the incident.

'If had a minute or two, I could've saved my wife'

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Thursday morning (October 15) and were scheduled to leave for Dhaka at 10:00am yesterday.

One family member, however, had left Cox's Bazar the previous night, leaving nine at the resort when the fire broke out. Of them, Ashikul and two others escaped, while the remaining six, including Maliha, are missing and feared dead.

The other two survivors, Maliha's maternal uncle Masud and his wife Nila, also received treatment at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. All three were flown to Dhaka in the evening.

The three were among at least nine survivors this correspondent saw at the hospital following the fire.

Fire Service officials said the recovered bodies could not be identified because they were severely burnt.

At the hospital, Ashikul repeatedly broke down in tears as he recounted his ordeal.

"If I had stayed there for even one more minute, I would have suffocated to death ... If only I had had another minute or two, I could have rescued my wife."

The six missing family members are Maliha, 28; her sisters, Layla Jahan Nabila, 26, and Fariha Kabir, 33; Fariha's five-year-old son, Faizan Ahmed; and Maliha's cousins, Milita Mehzabin Alvi, 23, and Md Nafis Tehami, 26.

Ashikul said Fariha's husband, Ifti, had left for Chuadanga the previous night.

Around 2:00pm yesterday, Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner A Mannan visited the injured at Sadar Hospital, where Ashikul provided details of his missing family members.

The DC said DNA samples were being taken from the recovered bodies, which would be handed over to their families once their identities were confirmed by matching the samples with those of relatives.

"However, as the identification process is still underway, we cannot immediately confirm whether any of the six missing family members are among the recovered bodies," he added.

Abdul Ahad Sarkar, a Jagannath University student and a relative of the family, said six of the nine family members staying at the resort had died, while three were injured.

"One brother-in-law had already returned last night. Of the remaining nine who were there, six [presumably] died and three were injured," Ahad said.

Nabila had studied chemistry at Jagannath University, while Tehami was studying Chinese language and culture at Dhaka University's Institute of Modern Languages.

DU Vice-Chancellor Prof ABM Obaidul Islam expressed deep sorrow over the deaths and called for the cause of the fire to be determined and those responsible brought to justice. He said the university would also provide necessary assistance to the bereaved family.

(Our DU and JnU correspondents contributed to this report.)

PM makes 13 surprise visits

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of Bangladesh at Mirpur, Paikpara Staff Quarters and Government Bangla College.

Tarique later inspected Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital at Agargaon.

He also visited his alma mater Dhaka Residential Model College, where he addressed students and urged them to help build a clean Bangladesh and plant more trees.

Tarique subsequently visited Dhanmondi Government Boys' High School, Kalabagan Staff Quarters and Azimpur Government Officers' and Employees' Residential Quarters.

Expressing dissatisfaction with poor cleanliness and management at several locations, he gave the authorities concerned two weeks to improve cleanliness at the Azimpur government quarters.

Earlier, during his visit to Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital, he gave the authorities seven days to improve the hospital's environment and cleanliness arrangements.

During his visit to Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, Tarique found Associate Professor Dr Rafiqul Islam smoking in his untidy room and immediately instructed the hospital chairman to take action against the doctor. Rafiqul was subsequently suspended.

He also visited a footpath freed from hawkers at Mirpur-10.

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Shafiqul Islam Khan Milton was present during the visit.

Throughout the surprise inspections, Tarique spoke to officials, students and members of the public, stressing the need for responsible action by the authorities concerned to improve public services, maintain cleanliness and protect public health.

3 of a family among 5 killed as truck rams auto-rickshaw



PHOTO: COLLECTED

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

Five people, including three of a family, were killed when a paddy-laden truck rammed into a battery-run auto-rickshaw in Roumari upazila of Kurigram yesterday afternoon.

The victims are Lipi Begum, 32, her children Rishad Islam, 12, and Tuba Akter, 7, of Chotlakanda village in Char Shoulmari union, Lipi's sister Sharifa Begum, 42, of Kartimari Bazar, and the auto-rickshaw driver, whose identity could not be known immediately, said police.

The accident occurred near Sayedabad Bazar on the Roumari-Dhaka highway around 2:30pm.

Sharifa's daughter, Brishti Khatun, 25, was critically injured and referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

A witness, Mofizul Islam, said the truck hit the auto-rickshaw at a high speed, flinging the passengers on the road. Three people died at the scene, while two children died on their way to hospital.

Mohammad Nabiul Islam, resident medical officer at Roumari Upazila Health Complex, confirmed that five people had died and one critically injured person had been referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Kausar Ali, officer-in-charge of Roumari Police Station, said the auto-rickshaw was travelling towards Kartimari when the truck, coming from the opposite direction, hit it.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Russel Kabir said the truck driver and helper fled after the accident. Police seized the truck and were examining its documents.

The accident disrupted traffic on the highway for nearly two and a half hours. Traffic returned to normal after 5:00pm.

Slain journalist warned SP of threat to life

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A video of the exchange between Alif and the SP was obtained by this correspondent, who attended the meeting.

In the presence of fellow journalists, whom he asked to bear witness, Alif described threats from armed criminals and expressed fears of an attack.

His fears ultimately came true.

Around 8:00pm on Thursday (October 15), unidentified assailants shot him dead as he was returning from a tea stall near his in-laws' house in the Telanjia area of Netrokona's Durgapur upazila.

Md Tarikul Islam took charge as Netrokona's superintendent of police on November 29, 2025. The following day, he met journalists from across the district at his office.

In the video, Alif is seen describing threats to his life and urging action against armed criminal gangs operating in the border upazilas of Durgapur and Kalmakanda.

"I report on organised crime, and my colleagues in this district will certainly attest to that. I cover notorious armed gangs operating here, from drug trafficking to other criminal activities."

He warned that law and order could deteriorate without effective action. "These organised gangs will wreak havoc in your district. Whether it is crude bombs, explosives or drugs, they are involved in it all."

Alif also said he had been assisting law enforcement agencies by providing information about criminals.

Frustrated by the lack of action and fearing for his safety, he said, "I am saying this in front of everyone, with them as witnesses. If these accused persons are not arrested, I will either have to leave the country or become a bigger criminal than them. Now, you have to make that decision."

When the SP asked whether police had failed to arrest the criminals or had been unable to do so, Alif replied, "There has been no attempt whatsoever to arrest them."

He also explained that although his ancestral home was in Kalmakanda upazila, he had been living with his wife and child at his in-laws' house in Durgapur after marrying a woman from an ethnic minority community.

He also feared for the safety of his in-laws and other family members. "They could set fire to this indigenous family's houses at any time. They threatened to do so yesterday [November 29, 2025] but failed. Today, perhaps because I am not there, they may try again. This could trigger communal violence in the area."

Alif's warnings have now resurfaced, raising questions about what steps were taken to protect him. However, investigators have yet to establish whether the armed gangs he mentioned were linked to his killing.

Earlier, on November 10 last year, assailants hacked and injured Alif near Teribazar ghat on the Someshwari River in Durgapur upazila. They also threatened a colleague of his with a weapon and chased him when he tried to intervene.

'HE LAST MET ME ON OCT 5'

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Netrokona Superintendent of Police Tarikul Islam said Alif had met Alif 10 days before his killing.

"He last met me on October 5. He gave me the names of several people and said they were planning a major operation along the border and needed my cooperation. I assured him of my support.

"He regularly provided me with information, so I did not ask about his sources. That was my last meeting with him. When I heard about his killing on October 15, I was shocked to the core."

Asked what steps police had taken to protect Alif after he reported threats to his life, the SP said, "When he told me about the threats at the meeting, I instructed the officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station to ensure his security at all times. I also asked Alif to inform us whenever he felt unsafe. But he did not report any further security concerns."

Asked about the armed gangs Alif had mentioned, Tarikul said, "He [Alif] did not tell me about all the gangs, but he mentioned a young man named Emon. We arrested Emon and sent him to court, but he has since been released on bail. He is a charge-sheeted accused in a case and remains on our list of suspects. We are still looking for him."

Asked about the investigation, the SP said, "It was a targeted killing, which is why the investigation is taking time. I am doing my best. We have some leads on the perpetrators and have formed an investigation committee. I hope we will get results very soon."

GROUPS CONDEMN KILLING

The Quick Response Support Team (QRS) and the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) have condemned Alif's killing, demanding a prompt, impartial investigation and scrutiny of why earlier threats to his safety were not adequately addressed.

QRS, a platform of journalists, civil society representatives and academics, began operating on January 1, 2026, to monitor, document and respond to threats to journalists' safety.

In separate statements issued yesterday, both groups noted that Alif had been attacked and critically injured on November 10, 2025, over his journalism.

Calling the murder a grave blow to press freedom and the rule of law, QRS said police had acknowledged the earlier attack and the threats to his safety.

"When a journalist who has reportedly faced previous attacks is killed, the authorities must establish not only who committed the crime, but also whether earlier threats were adequately addressed," it said, adding that any failure by law enforcers to act on known risks must be examined as part of the investigation.

HRSS called for an impartial inquiry into any possible link between the November 2025 attack and Alif's killing, as well as the steps authorities took if he had previously sought protection.

Both groups urged the government and the home ministry to immediately arrest those responsible for planning and carrying out the murder.

They also demanded adequate security, legal aid and compensation for Alif's family and witnesses, along with a coordinated mechanism to assess risks and protect journalists covering crime and corruption nationwide.