Jubo Dal leader hacked to death in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Narayanganj

A local Jubo Dal leader was hacked to death by unidentified assailants when he was returning home from his pharmacy in the district's Sonargaon upazila on Wednesday night.

The victim, Fakir Zahir Rahman, 40, was a joint convener of Araihazar upazila Jubo Dal and president of its Kalapaharia union unit, police said.

Mohammad Abdul Barik, officer-in-charge of Sonargaon Police Station, said Zahir came under attack around 10:00pm in the Char Kishoreganj area of Sonargaon upazila.

Zahir ran a pharmacy in the Char Kishoreganj area but lived in a rented house in neighbouring Munshiganj Sadar upazila.

He died while undergoing treatment at a Munshiganj hospital.

Police are investigating the killing, said OC Barik, adding that no case has yet been filed in connection with the incident.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman waves from a boat to people gathered along the riverbank to welcome him on his arrival in Mongla, Bagerhat, yesterday afternoon. Tarique inspected Mongla Port, the Sundarbans and the site of a proposed economic zone in Bagerhat during his visit to the southwestern region. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Envoy to Japan to be kept in Dhaka during PM's visit

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT



Md Daud Ali

Bangladesh's Ambassador to Japan Md Daud Ali will remain in Dhaka during Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit to Japan from October 26 to 29 following a government decision, a foreign ministry official said.

Meanwhile, Md Nazrul Islam, secretary for bilateral affairs at the foreign ministry, has been sent to Tokyo to oversee diplomatic matters and coordinate arrangements for the visit.

An official familiar with the developments, seeking anonymity, said the government decided to send Nazrul to Tokyo on October 19.

"The order recalling the ambassador was signed on October 15. He was asked to be in Dhaka within two days," the official said.

Daud will remain in Dhaka until the prime minister's visit ends, the official added.

Diplomatic sources said Nazrul would stay in Tokyo throughout the visit, taking the lead in bilateral coordination and providing diplomatic support.

Foreign ministry officials said Daud was recalled to Dhaka for consultations on the visit. However, several senior officials, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said the ambassador

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Saudi downs drones in Riyadh, Madinah areas

Four killed in Houthi attacks on Dammam airport, Aramco oilfield; two Bangladeshis among several injured

STAR REPORT

Saudi Arabia yesterday said it downed drones in the areas of Riyadh and the holy city of Madinah, as Yemen's Houthis carry out daily attacks on the kingdom.

"Interception and destruction of four drones in the regions of Riyadh and Madinah," said Turki Al-Malki in a post on X, the spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed group.

Meanwhile, two people were killed and several others, including two Bangladeshis, were injured in a separate Houthi attack on Dammam airport on Wednesday evening, Saudi authorities said yesterday.

Those killed at the King Fahd International Airport in Dammam were a Saudi citizen and an Indian national.

The two injured Bangladeshis, identified as Sajal Chandra Das of Cumilla and Mohammad Abdur Rahim of Noakhali, are undergoing treatment at Saudi German Hospital in Dammam, Bangladesh Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment said yesterday.

According to the ministry, both lost consciousness due to heat and smoke following the attack but sustained no visible physical injuries.

Two more people were killed by falling debris after Saudi air defences intercepted a drone that was attempting to hit a facility at Saudi Aramco's Shaybah oilfield on Wednesday evening, the Saudi energy ministry said.

The incident caused a fire in a vehicle outside the perimeter of Saudi Aramco's Shaybah oilfield facility but did not affect operations at the field, the ministry said, citing an official source. Saudi Aramco has instructed staff to evacuate its headquarters in Dhahran and work remotely, six sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Meanwhile, the US State Department has ordered some diplomats and family members to depart from its missions in Saudi Arabia and plans to withdraw family members from a number of other US missions in the region, US officials said.

In a separate development, Yemen's Houthis said yesterday that they were attempting to rescue a boat carrying 14 Indians near Zuqar island in the Red Sea, alleging that it was targeted by Saudi Arabia.

A Houthi maritime blockade in the Red Sea is also threatening oil shipments from Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest exporter of crude.

The Houthi attacks follow the collapse in July of a years-long truce in Yemen's civil war, where the Iran-backed group is fighting the government supported by a Saudi-led coalition.

The Houthis declared a maritime blockade of Saudi Arabia and began hitting its ships, territory and oil facilities, before launching a major offensive in September in which they seized government-held territory along the Red Sea coast.

In response, the Saudi air force has frequently targeted areas under Houthi control, which includes much of impoverished Yemen.

HOUTHI ATTACKS

No Biman flights to Riyadh till Oct 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has suspended all flights from Dhaka to Dammam scheduled for October 23, 24 and 25 following an attack on King Fahd International Airport in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday night.

The national flag carrier has also suspended all Dhaka–Riyadh flights until October 31 due to ongoing air attacks, citing passenger safety.

In a press release yesterday, Biman said revised schedules and further decisions on the suspended flights would be announced later.

Restrictions at Saudi Arabian airports have affected 135 flights involving Bangladesh and disrupted travel for 20,672 passengers.

Just a day earlier, Biman had announced plans to operate a Riyadh flight later this month and continue daily Dammam services until October 26.

Flights from Dhaka to Jeddah and Madinah will continue as scheduled, the airline said.

Passengers affected by the Dammam and Riyadh suspensions may travel through the Jeddah and Madinah airports, subject to seat availability.

Biman advised passengers to contact its nearest sales offices for ticketing and travel information.

Saudi Arabia yesterday said it downed drones in the areas of Riyadh and the holy city of Madina, as Yemen's

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Govt plans Tk 21,900cr

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According to proposals by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), the projects will cover half of the 20,767 secondary and higher secondary educational institutions and be implemented between January 2027 and December 2031.

"The initiatives are intended to foster students' interest in technology and give them hands-on support in developing their own projects," said Shefatul Islam, research officer at DSHE's Planning and Development Wing.

Conventional classroom teaching often struggles to retain students' attention, while existing facilities are not adequately equipped to meet evolving skill requirements, he said.

The larger of the two projects, titled "Enhancing Technological Capacity and Establishing Smart Learning Environment in Secondary and Higher Secondary Educational Institutions", will cost Tk 18,505 crore. It seeks to introduce technology-based teaching and learning in schools.

The second project, the NextGen Secondary Education Program (NGEP), will involve Tk 3,397 crore, with a focus on teacher training, classroom expansion and improved facilities for science, technology and practical learning.

Mir Zahida Naznin, DSHE director (Planning and Development), said the proposal for NGEP is now with the Planning Commission for approval after the completion of a feasibility study.

The proposal for the Tk 18,505-crore project is undergoing a feasibility study, she told this newspaper recently.

Naznin said the new initiative would be different from previous investments in digital and multimedia classrooms.

The authorities will consider the expansion of existing infrastructure, particularly whether buildings can be expanded vertically to accommodate three additional rooms for laboratories, she added.

Bangladesh has around 328,000 teachers for more than 89 lakh students in 20,767 secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across the country, shows data from Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS).

Meanwhile, several educationists have stressed the need for better planning and a proper assessment of institutional readiness before large-scale projects are rolled out.

They said that equipping schools with computers, high-speed internet and interactive digital panels will not automatically improve the quality of education. The main challenge will be to ensure that substantial investments translate into better teaching and learning, rather than adding equipment and infrastructure to schools.

They noted that previous initiatives to introduce technology in schools had faced serious implementation challenges.

One such initiative was the ICT for Education Project, which DSHE launched more than a decade ago in two phases. In the first phase, multimedia equipment worth over Tk 294 crore was provided to 23,331 educational institutions in 2015.

Three years later, an evaluation by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) found that 24 percent of surveyed teachers had unusable laptops, 14 percent had unusable projectors, and 56 percent said the training they received did not adequately prepare them to develop multimedia content.

The second phase, launched in 2016, aimed to equip 36,084 classrooms. The Tk 1,348-crore project, originally scheduled for completion by June 2020, received four deadline extensions and most recently missed its revised completion target of June 2026.

The government is now considering revising and reviving the project, said education officials.

Another government initiative that fell far short of expectations was the Tk 299-crore Sheikh Russel Digital Lab Project, launched by the ICT Division in 2014 to establish laboratories in schools in two phases.

In the first phase, 4,001 laboratories were set up between 2015 and 2019 at a revised cost of Tk 398 crore.

The second phase, approved in 2020 at a cost of Tk 939 crore, sought to establish another 5,000 laboratories and advanced digital learning facilities at 300 selected schools, labelled as Schools of Future.

In 2025, a white paper commissioned by the interim government found that the laboratories had serious shortcomings, including non-functional equipment, inadequate maintenance, and the selection of schools was politically motivated.

When contacted, M Niaz Asadullah, who chaired the white paper taskforce, said equipment had been supplied without functioning software and teachers were not properly trained to operate digital devices.

Niaz, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, further said his analysis of SSC results from 2021 to 2023 found no significant improvement in pass rates or GPA-5 outcomes in schools with digital labs.

Regarding the latest government move, he said, "Before committing Tk 21,900 crore, the government must explain how these projects will improve learning."

He urged the government to carry out an independent evaluation, put in place a transparent procurement mechanism and set aside funds for maintenance before making investments.

Samir Ranjan Nath, programme head at the BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, said the government should first examine whether earlier investments in computers, laboratory facilities and teacher training had changed teachers' attitudes and improved classroom learning.

He argued that the government should prioritise the use of equipment already supplied to schools instead of launching new projects. Upazila education officials could be tasked with monitoring the use of digital devices.

Samir also said some large projects were designed primarily to spend public money rather than meet educational needs. "Irregularities in public procurement are a long-standing disease in this country."

According to experts, project implementation is sometimes hampered by a section of teachers' reluctance to use digital devices.

A 2020-21 BANBEIS study covering 384 secondary schools and madrasas found that of the 1,655 ICT devices recorded, 215 remained unused and 248 were out of order.

Samir said some teachers developed negative attitudes towards technology after observing students' misuse of digital devices, particularly mobile phones, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and families also struggled to guide students towards appropriate use of technology during that period.

Another significant challenge in implementing technology-driven projects is the persistent rural-urban gap in internet access.

According to the ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals Survey 2024-25, around 65 percent of urban households had internet access at home against 50.5 percent in rural areas. The gap is wider in computer ownership as 21.1 percent of urban households owned a computer, compared with 3.6 percent of rural households.

BRINGING TECHNOLOGY INTO CLASSROOMS

The Tk 18,505-crore project seeks to reduce the digital divide between urban and rural students by giving them equal access to technology-based education.

Interactive digital panels will be installed in 100,000 classrooms across 10,000 educational institutions. Each institution will receive broadband connectivity with a speed of 100 megabits per second (Mbps).

The project proposal includes the introduction of digital identification numbers and smart cards for teachers and students, and the creation of an online platform for organising teaching and learning activities and a digital library for storing educational materials.

Teachers will receive tablet computers and training in digital pedagogy, which goes beyond the simple use of computers and other devices. It involves using digital tools to make lessons more engaging, improve teaching methods and better understand students' learning needs, according to DSHE officials.

EXPANSION OF CLASSROOMS, LAB FACILITIES

The Tk 3,397-crore NGEP project seeks to improve the learning environment, strengthen teachers' professional skills and expand access to science and technology education.

The government will provide Tk 566.09 crore and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Tk 2,662 crore for the project. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) will offer additional support.

Under the project, training on assessment methods and digital content development will be given to 369,643 teachers and education administrators.

At least 3,000 classrooms will be constructed in 1,000 upazila-level schools using a vertical expansion model, the proposal said.

The project aims to strengthen science and technology education through specialised facilities. At least 2,100 ICT and artificial intelligence laboratories will be set up in 1,050 secondary schools, featuring learning zones for robotics, 3D printing, machine learning and advanced computing.

Teachers' common rooms will be modernised, science laboratories upgraded, and laboratory equipment and furniture provided to 1,050 schools, said the proposal.

Gunshots shatter Sajek serenity

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Speaking to The Daily Star, he alleged that law enforcers first used truncheons and then threw brick chunks and stones at protesters.

"When the protesters refused to leave, the law enforcement personnel opened fire on them. Now, the law enforcement agencies are blaming the protesters," he said.

He claimed that more than 57 civilians had been injured by truncheon charges and gunfire by security forces and that the number could rise. He also alleged that law enforcers were preventing the injured from being taken to hospitals.Residents of Ujo Bazar and several people living in nearby areas had also been forced to leave their homes and shops, he said.

Tourist Sanjida Akter told The Daily Star that the blockade worried them.

"Just before evening on Wednesday, we suddenly heard that an organisation had called a road blockade. On our way back today [Thursday], the protesters stopped our vehicles. Despite the fear and anxiety, we managed to reach Khagrachhari safely. I will feel relieved when we reach home in Dhaka by bus tonight [Thursday]," she said.

The two organisations announced an indefinite blockade of the road to Sajek tourist centre on Wednesday afternoon. Following the announcement, the district administration suspended tourist travel to the valley from that evening and asked tourists to leave by 4:00pm yesterday.

Jugeshwar Tripura, an employee of Sampari Guest House in Sajek, said he was returning home after the tourist centre was declared closed.

"When we reached Ujo Bazar, we saw that the vehicles had been stopped. Later, members of the law enforcement agencies escorted our vehicles and brought us here," he said.

Babudhan Chakma earlier told The Daily Star that their three demands were the removal of armed PCJSS members from Sajek, an end to death threats against innocent people, and a halt to searches of ordinary people's homes by law enforcement agencies.

The organisations had first enforced an indefinite blockade on October 11. They later presented their demands to the administration and suspended the blockade for two days after receiving assurances. When the demands remained unmet, they resumed the blockade on October 15.

The blockade was suspended during Durga Puja but has now resumed, with the organisations saying their demands remain unmet.

Contacted, Nagendra Chakma, general secretary of the PCJSS Rangamati district unit, dismissed the allegations against his organisation as baseless.

"The PCJSS has no activities in Sajek and is not involved in the incidents taking place there," he said.

Meanwhile, another indigenous community organisation, Chhatra Janata Sangram Parishad, called a half-day blockade in Rangamati and Khagrachhari on Saturday.

In a press release issued yesterday, the organisation said it called the blockade in protest against attacks, truncheon charges and vandalism during yesterday's blockade in Sajek.

Opposition Leader and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman expressed concern over the tourists being stranded and reports of a gunfight.

In a post on his verified Facebook page around 2:15pm yesterday, he asked, "What is happening centring Sajek in Baghaichari upazila of Rangamati district?

"Instead of chasing false intelligence, clear steps need to be taken in this regard based on accurate intelligence.

"No one has the right to play with the lives of ordinary citizens. Take appropriate action while there is still time," he added.

Govt rings alarm

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offline as a precaution on Wednesday while website operators scrambled to secure systems running the software.

The emergency shutdowns of banking, airline, rail, tax and government services from Tokyo to Helsinki mark one of the most dramatic tests of the decades-old programming tools that keep the web running, exposing how deeply governments and companies depend on code that few people understand.

Cloudflare, a company that helps protect websites from cyberattacks, reported millions of attempts to exploit the vulnerabilities following their public disclosure.

As a precaution, Bangladesh Bank (BB), the country's central bank, has taken down its website since noon yesterday following a global cybersecurity alert, its spokesperson, Arief Hossain Khan, told The Daily Star.

He said the central bank's IT department was working on the issue but did not say when the website would be restored.

The CIRT advisory states that the flaws could allow an attacker to "execute code on a web server without first authenticating to the application".

The agency identified government portals, public-facing application programming interfaces (APIs), administrative systems and e-commerce platforms as examples of applications that may be affected.

It urged organisations to "inventory all PHP runtimes and prioritise public-facing systems for immediate patching", according to the advisory. This means identifying all PHP installations across their systems and prioritising those accessible through the internet for security updates.

According to the CIRT advisory, the two PHP vulnerabilities, collectively known as PHP2Shell, are identified as CVE-2026-109618 and CVE-2026-109619. They could allow attackers to run their own commands on affected servers without first logging in, potentially exposing stored information or disrupting online services.

PHP is a programming language that works behind the scenes of websites, processing requests, retrieving information from databases and delivering content to users. It underpins many online services, including websites built with platforms such as WordPress and Drupal.