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US report points at pressure on minorities, extra-judicial killings and corruption

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States has said it increased monitoring on issues related to intimidation and other forms of pressure on minorities, especially Hindus, in anticipation of the next general election in Bangladesh as happened during the previous election campaigns.

A US State Department report styled "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The US Record 2005-2006" also said weak political and governmental institutions, pervasive corruption and general indifference by ruling parties to human rights continued to undermine basic civil liberties.

The report released on Wednesday and submitted to Congress said extra-judicial killings, torture, and other widespread abuses by law enforcement personnel such as the police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) went largely unpunished, and "the BNP exploited its position to gain unfair advantage over the opposition."

Supporting Human Rights and Democracy addresses US efforts in 95 countries and demonstrates the link between the findings of the annual country reports—a comprehensive, accurate account on human rights conditions around the world—and the efforts by the US to help remedy the human rights abuses identified in the reports, said a press release issued by the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy in Dhaka on Thursday.

"Bangladesh's elections are generally free and fair, although politics are traditionally acrimonious. Violence resulting in death was a pervasive element in the

Unfit launches ply under nose of vigilance team

RAFIQ HASAN

Unfit launches keep plying different routes between the capital and other places across the country despite a vigilance team being in operation at Sadarghat, the premier launch terminal.

With thunderstorms already beginning to blow from the north-west, the plying of these vessels could any time cause severe disasters.

During a visit to the Sadarghat on Thursday, The Daily Star corre-

spondent found a number of big vessels, which were categorised as C, the ones barely fit to operate, waiting for departure from the terminal. They operate services thanks to 'specially managed' route permits and survey certificates from the government, said sources.

Owners, however, claim they have obtained permission by upgrading condition of their launches.

"We don't give time schedule to unfit launches unless their position

is elevated," said a port official at Sadarghat terminal.

The C category launches that were at the terminal yesterday include MV Sattar Khan, MV Running Sun, MV Shining Sun.

Sources at the shipping department said the influential owners pressure the government into issuing route permits and fitness certificates for the unfit launches.

Director General of the department AKM Shafiqullah acknowledged that the plying of unfit launches could not yet be stopped. He said, "We however have stepped up vigilance to avert launch disasters."

"The vigilance teams would usually start operating from April 10, but this year they are working from April 1, considering earlier onset of inclement weather," he added.

Shafiqullah told The Daily Star that the deputy commissioners of all districts have been asked to take measures to stop launches from plying in adverse weather conditions, and to contain overloading of vessels and violation of navigation rules.

He said the launches that do not have the capacity to carry 150 passengers have been prohibited from plying at night during stormy seasons. Besides, the navy, coast-guard and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) have also been alerted accordingly.

A few months ago, the shipping



STAFF PHOTO

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PHOTO: STAR

A women's procession paraded city streets yesterday protesting water and power crises and continued price spiral of essentials. Nari Mukti Sangsad brought out the procession from Mukhtangon.

Minu, Shahjahan smell conspiracy Steps taken for legal action

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

With the next general elections around the corner, Thursday's Kansat incident was staged as part of a conspiracy to damage the image of ruling BNP, Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu told a press conference at Chapainawabganj district circuit house yesterday.

Minu, also a BNP lawmaker and minister in charge of Chapainawabganj district, said legal actions would be taken against the people responsible for the law breaking and the killings. "We already have asked the law enforcers to do that," he told the assembled newsmen.

Talking to The Daily Star, the mayor blamed Bikalpa Dhara

KANSAT DEATH TOLL 4 Indefinite hartal, road barricade paralyse land port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Thursday's Kansat skirmishes claimed yet another life, raising the death toll of the 150-minute battle between local BNP activists and power-hungry villagers to four, the police said yesterday.

Meanwhile, Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Parishad (PBUSP) or 'the action committee for rural power development'

yesterday enforced an indefinite hartal in Shibganj upazila, condemning and protesting Thursday's BNP attack on its procession.

As part of the general strike, the PBUSP workers have snapped road communication in and through the upazila of the north-western bordering district of Chapainawabganj by putting up barricades on roads

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Fresh vows as election nears while old pledges forgotten

ZAYADUL AHSAN and SHAKHAWAT LITON

NEWS ANALYSIS

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her cabinet colleagues have "unofficially" started the party's campaign for the next general election due in early 2007 with most of the 2001 election pledges remaining unfulfilled.

The ruling BNP high-ups speaking at rallies and meetings across the country are seeking re-election with the pledge to root out corruption and introduce free education for female students up to the degree level.

Besides, they have started declaring area-specific development plans in different districts

with the promise to implement those if voted to power again.

Before the last parliamentary election in which BNP secured a landslide victory, party Chairperson Khaleda Zia had announced her party's 32-point election manifesto that included the pledges to free Bangladesh from corruption and terrorism.

The BNP had also promised separation of the judiciary from the executive, appointment of ombudsman, setting up a national human rights commission, repealing the Special Powers Act, election to zilla and upazila parishads and

autonomy to state-run media. But all these pledges have been mired in uncertainty and there is little possibility of their implementation in the remaining seven months of the government's tenure.

The BNP policymakers however keep on claiming that they are fulfilling election pledges one after another.

One of the vital pledges was to root out corruption from the state and social levels, but in reality the situation has worsened under the four-party alliance regime due to lack of effective measures to curb grafts. Transparency International rated Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation in four successive

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CMCH interns to observe 2-hr strike from today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Sufferings of patients at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) increased further as the intern doctors' strike continued for the third consecutive day yesterday.

Leaders of Intern Doctors Association (IDA), CMCH yesterday expressed their strong stand on continuing the indefinite strike.

They also vowed to observe a two-hour token sit-in programme in front of the academic office daily, starting from 9:00am today, until their demand for payment of the increased allowance is met.

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Govt just killing time in the name of dialogue

Says AL citing PM's remarks at rallies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) yesterday said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government is not interested in reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC), and it is evident from the prime minister's vehement opposition to those.

The head of the government is repeatedly saying 'no' to the reforms proposed by the 14-party opposition combine in her speeches at different public meetings and party rallies. This proves the government is just killing time

in the name of dialogue on them, AL leaders said at the party Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meeting.

AL chief and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting held at the party's Dhanmondi office.

Briefing newsmen later, AL's acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader said, "It has become crystal clear from the prime minister's remarks that she is not at all interested in the opposition-proposed reforms which have now become a national demand."

On BNP Secretary General

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's letter to his AL counterpart Abdul Jalil for discussion on reforms, Quader said it is simply intended to kill time.

The ALCWC meeting unanimously decided that the party would not participate in any dialogue with anti-liberation forces, war criminals and collaborators of 1971 as well as religious fanatics.

"Our stand on anti-liberation elements, war criminals and fanatics is clear in our general secretary's letter to the BNP secretary general on Thursday suggesting

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Satkania BNP men show black flags to Jamaat lawmaker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Activists of Satkania upazila unit of ruling BNP during a demonstration yesterday showed black flags, shoes and broomsticks to Jamaat lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury and other leaders, who were also holding a rally nearby.

A brief chase and counter-chase took place between the activists of the two parties. Police forces were kept on alert to ward off any clash, sources and witnesses said.

Shahjahan Chowdhury, lawmaker from Satkania constituency, flanked by other leaders arrived at the Aochia Girls' High School premises at 10:00am to attend a meeting of Satkania unit Jamaat workers.

The Aochia union BNP also convened a rally at nearby

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AL front body leader shot dead at Jurain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An Awami Swechchhasebok League leader was shot dead by unidentified assailants at Jurain under Shyampur Police Station of the capital on Thursday night.

Being informed by the locals, police recovered the body of Rahat Hossain Ripon, 32, publicity secretary of Awami Swechchhasebok League Dhanmondi unit, from Jurain Balur Math at around 8:30pm. They sent the body to Midford Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Police said marks of bullet wounds were found on his head. Family sources said Ripon's

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Smuggled chicks seized in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) seized at least 4,550 smuggled Indian chicks and arrested one person yesterday at a house in Baikaria in Sadar upazila and foiled a push in attempt of the BSF in the same upazila.

BDR and police sources said BDR personnel, after a tip off, raided the house of Kalu Mia and seized the chicks. They arrested Kalu Mia.

On contact, Major Sheikh Asad of 41 Battalion confirmed the incident and said the BDR is now on high alert as smuggled Indian chicks could trigger a bird-flu epidemic in the country.

Meanwhile, BDR foiled Indian

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MORGUE IN MESS

A butcher-shop for autopsies

DMCH Doms still use primitive tools

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Though autopsy plays a key role in determining the cause of a death and the outcome of any lawsuit about it, the morgue at the country's largest public hospital is unbelievably ill equipped and lacking in facilities to do the job.

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue has to carry out post-mortems on about 10 corpses a day with outdated, worn out equipment

and inadequate facilities no better than a slaughterhouse's.

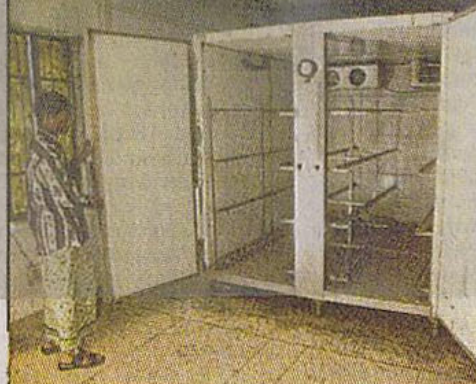
The 20 feet by 25 feet dissection room is less than one-fourth of the standard space it should have, says Dr Kamrul Hassan Sardar, assistant professor at the DMC forensic medicine department. The gallery from which the students observe how autopsies are done is also too small.

There is no air-conditioning either; an air conditioner is there, but it hardly works. For lack of space, its lone 8-drawer freezer

for preserving corpses is kept in a corridor, and that too had been out of order for about eight months until it was fixed on April 1 on repeated requests, Dr Sardar laments.

In absence of a storage area, let alone an air-conditioned one, hundreds of plastic pots containing viscera are kept haphazardly on the floor beside the freezer in the corridor. People are passing by them all the while, making the evidence exposed to being stolen

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A poorly maintained refrigerator at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital morgue, left, and instruments used for autopsy.

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