

Charity brands number of UK prison deaths 'national scandal'

AFP, London

The death toll in British prisons is "a national scandal", a pressure group said yesterday, calling for a reduction in inmate numbers just as the government is promising tougher sentences.

Inquest, which probes state related deaths, said in a new report that there were six deaths and nearly two suicides every week inside British jails last year.

It called the rate "shocking and unacceptable", noting many fatalities were found to be preventable, and criticised record levels of distress and self-harm within the system.

The charity said Prime Minister Boris Johnson should make "a substantial reduction in the prison population" and invest instead in health and community-based alternatives to jail.

Johnson and his Conservative party won a comfortable parliamentary majority at elections in December on a manifesto that included vowing to be tougher on crime.

On Tuesday, interior minister Priti Patel and justice minister Robert Buckland unveiled plans to increase sentences for more serious crimes, including terrorism offences.

The plans also target the end of the early release of some prisoners.

The Tories pledged during the election they would create 10,000 more prison places and spend an extra £100 million (\$130 million, 118 million euros) cracking down on crime in jails.

Inquest's executive director Deborah Coles said the current rate of prison deaths, alongside the repeated failure to enact change, were leaving inmates and their families "traumatised".

"Appalling inspection reports, damning inquest findings, and statistics on yet more deaths, have become so regular that those in power seem to forget these are human beings to whom the state owes a duty of care," she added.

In its report the charity found there were 308 deaths in prison in the 12 months to September 2019 -- nearly double the number of a decade ago.

Re-election

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differences of opinion among political parties regarding the use of EVMs in Dhaka city polls.

The commissioner said he supported the use of EVMs in the election for two reasons -- one was that it could put an end to "the culture of casting votes on the night before the voting day" and the other was that it would stop casting of 100 percent votes at any given centre.

"Using EVM in the polls is an acid test for Election Commission... future of the machine is depending on the success of its use in Dhaka city polls," Mahubb said.

At the meeting, law enforcers urged the EC to restrict the use of personal cars on election day as it would create problems for them to manage traffic as well as the movement of the people related to the election.

EC senior secretary Md Alamgir later said the commission had agreed to the proposal and no private cars would be allowed to ply during the election.

The restriction will be in force from the midnight of January 31 until 6:00pm of February 2.

Three workers

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underway on the banks of the river. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is carrying out the work.

BIWTA officials said they awarded the contract to Standard Engineers Ltd and the company was responsible for ensuring the safety of workers.

Some locals said they heard a big bang after the iron pole came into contact with the electric wire. Panicked, some workers ran to safety.

A little later, locals rescued the victims using a bamboo. The injured were sent to a nearby hospital.

Asked about the incident, Nur Mohammad Sabuj, assistant manager (HR and admin) of Standard Engineers Ltd, said they hired several groups of labourers for the work and the victims were members of one those groups.

"We always made the workers' leaders aware of safety and asked them to use safety gears... We will talk to the victims' families and take measures as per the company policy regarding compensations," he told this correspondent.

BIWTA Joint Director AKM Arif Uddin said, "We should have been more careful about the safety issue... we will put pressure on the engineering firm to compensate the victims' families."

He said they would write to the authorities concerned to remove the electric wires dangling dangerously from electricity poles in the area.

The bodies of the victims were sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsies.



Health officers screen arriving passengers from China with thermal scanners at Changi International airport in Singapore yesterday as authorities increased measure against coronavirus.

PHOTO: AFP

New virus could mutate, spread

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In Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic, large public events were cancelled and international football matches were moved to new location. Visitors were urged to stay away, while residents were advised to not to leave the central city of 11 million people.

The illness is mainly transmitted via the respiratory tract and there "is the possibility of viral mutation and further spread of the disease", health commission vice minister Li Bin told a news conference in Beijing.

The virus has now infected at least 473 people across the country, with most cases in Wuhan. Li added that 1,394 people are still under medical observation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) started an emergency meeting yesterday to determine whether to declare a rare global public health emergency over the disease, which has now been detected in the United States, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Macau.

WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said new cases of the coronavirus may keep coming.

The first case in the United States -- a Seattle resident in his 30s -- is in good condition, American officials said.

The Chinese government has classified the outbreak in the same category as the SARS epidemic, meaning compulsory isolation for those diagnosed with the illness and the potential to implement quarantine measures.

But they still have not been able to confirm the exact source of the virus.

"We will step up research efforts to

identify the source and transmission of the disease," Li said, although he said experts believe "the cases are mostly linked to Wuhan".

Countries have been intensifying efforts to stop the spread of the pathogen -- known by its technical name 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) -- as the number of cases jumped.

Plane passengers are facing screening measures at five US airports and a host of transport hubs across Asia.

North Korea will ban foreign tourists entirely to protect itself against the virus, according to a major tour operator.

Britain's Heathrow Airport will introduce separate areas for passengers travelling from regions that have been affected by the new flu-like coronavirus in China, UK transport minister Grant Shapps said yesterday.

A prominent expert from China's National Health Commission confirmed this week that the virus can be passed between people.

However, animals are suspected to be the primary source of the outbreak.

A price list circulating online in China for a business at the Wuhan market lists a menagerie of animals or animal-based products including live foxes, crocodiles, wolf puppies and rats. It also offered civets, the animal linked to SARS.

"We already know that the disease originated from a market which conducted illegal transaction of wild animals," said Gao Fu, director of the Chinese centre for disease control and prevention.

He said it was clear "this virus is

adapting and mutating".

Hong Kong and British scientists have estimated that between 1,300 and 1,700 people in Wuhan may have been infected.

Health authorities are urging people to wash their hands regularly, avoid crowded places, get plenty of fresh air and wear a mask if they have a cough.

Anyone with a cough or fever was urged to go to hospital.

Surgical masks and antibacterial products were starting to sell out on some popular online sites and pharmacies.

At the capital's main international airport, the majority of people were wearing masks.

Hong Kong flag carrier Cathay Airlines said they agreed to allow staff to wear surgical masks on mainland China flights, adding they would offer masks and antiseptic wipes to passengers travelling from Wuhan to the city.

In Wuhan, police were conducting vehicle spot checks for live poultry or wild animals leaving and entering the city, state media said. Officials also screened people on roads, the airport and the train station for fevers.

"If it's not necessary we suggest that people don't come to Wuhan," Mayor Zhou Xianwang told state broadcaster CCTV.

The local government has cancelled major public activities and banned tour groups from heading out of the city. Women's football qualifiers for the Tokyo Olympic Games that were supposed to be held in Wuhan between February 3-9 were moved to the eastern city of Nanjing.

GOP-devised trial rules prevails

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House, the State Department, the Defense Department and the Office of Management and Budget related to Trump's dealings with Ukraine.

By the same tally, senators also rejected requests for subpoenas seeking the testimony of acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, former national security adviser John Bolton, White House aide Robert Blair and White House budget official Michael Duffey.

Under McConnell's hastily revised set of procedures for the trial, there will be 48 hours of opening arguments - 24 hours for each side - over six days, easing off an earlier plan to keep them to two days each. It also allows the House's record of the probe to be admitted as evidence.

The arguments were to begin when the trial resumes at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT) yesterday.

Republican senators have not ruled out the possibility of further testimony and evidence at some point after opening arguments and 16 hours of senators' questions, but they held firm with Trump's lawyers to block Tuesday's Democratic requests for witnesses and evidence - a potentially good sign for the White House.

White House counsel Pat Cipollone, who is leading Trump's defense, attacked the foundation of the charges against the Republican president and said Democrats had not come close to meeting the US Constitution's standard for impeachment.

"The only conclusion will be that the president has done absolutely nothing wrong," Cipollone said, arguing in favor of McConnell's proposal to wait until later in the trial to decide whether to allow further witnesses or documents.

"There is absolutely no case," he said.

After a particularly heated exchange over whether Bolton should testify, Roberts admonished both parties to remember they were addressing the world's greatest deliberative body. "I do think those addressing the Senate should remember where they are," he said.

Democratic Representative Adam Schiff, who helped spearhead the House impeachment inquiry, said the president had committed

"constitutional misconduct justifying impeachment."

While the evidence against Trump was "already overwhelming," further witness testimony was necessary to show the full scope of the misconduct by the president and those around him, he said.

Republican senators have not ruled out the possibility of further testimony and evidence at some point after opening arguments and senators' questions.

But Democrats said they forced repeated votes on evidence and witnesses, which extended late into the night, to get Republicans on the record immediately.

"This may be our only chance, tonight, to make this a fair trial. And it's just increasingly clear that the White House has no answers for why these documents and these witnesses shouldn't be produced," US Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut told reporters.

Under McConnell's plan, lawyers for Trump could move early in the proceedings to ask senators to dismiss all charges, according to a senior Republican leadership aide, a motion that would likely fall short of the support needed to succeed.

Even if such a motion fails, Trump is almost certain to be acquitted by the 100-member chamber, where a two-thirds majority is needed to remove him from office.

But the impact of the trial on his re-election bid in November is far from clear.

Democrats accuse Trump of pressuring Ukraine, a vulnerable ally, to interfere in US elections at the expense of American national security and say he is a danger to American democracy.

Trump and his legal team say there was no pressure and that the Democrats' case is based on hearsay. Cipollone described the Ukraine investigation as an illegal attempt to remove a democratically elected president and avert his re-election.

"They're not here to steal one election, they're here to steal two elections," Cipollone said.

The White House defense team also repeated some false charges. Cipollone said Republicans were excluded from the secure facility where the initial depositions for the House impeachment hearings took

place, when Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee were not only present but questioned witnesses.

Trump lawyer Jay Sekulow said the White House was not allowed to have a lawyer present during the impeachment hearings, when in fact it declined to participate.

The Senate trial is expected to continue six days a week, Monday through Saturday, until at least the end of January.

Televised congressional testimony from a parade of current and former officials who spoke of a coordinated effort to pressure Ukraine to investigate Biden and his son, Hunter, has done little to change support for and against Trump's impeachment. Reuters/Ipsos polling since the inquiry began shows Democrats and Republicans responding largely along party lines.

No president has ever been removed through impeachment, a mechanism the nation's founders - worried about a monarch on American soil - devised to oust a president for "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors." One, Richard Nixon, resigned in the face of a looming impeachment.

Stalker pushes

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As Jerin took the autorickshaw to her school, Zakir and two of his accomplices intercepted the vehicle on its way and got into it.

Zakir tried to pressure her into a relationship once again inside the vehicle. As she refused, he shoved her out of the running autorickshaw.

Locals rescued Jerin and rushed her to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where she succumbed to her injuries on Monday morning.

As the news of her death spread, Jerin's classmate blocked the roads adjacent to the school and demanded investigation into the incident.

The victim's father filed a case with Habiganj Police Station accusing Zakir and five other unnamed people on Monday night, said Masuk Ali, officer-in-charge of Habiganj Police Station.

Zakir was sent to jail through the Habiganj court, he said, adding that they were trying to arrest the rest of the perpetrators.

It's 'Mujib Borsho' gift

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"We will celebrate Mujib Borsho from March 17, 2020 to March 17, 2021 and its countdown has already begun... we will also celebrate golden jubilee of the country's independence in 2021."

She expressed gratitude to the people for reelecting the Awami League and giving it the opportunity to serve them again.

Talking about expatriate Bangladeshis, the PM said they send remittances which were making huge contributions to the country's economy. "So, we remain careful to make sure that they don't become victims of any type of harassment."

Hasina said 118 countries have already introduced e-passports and Bangladesh is the 119th country to have done this. Bangladesh is the first country in South Asia which has been able to introduce e-passport, she added.

The PM said the government has digitalised all the activities of the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) to attain the immigration-related SDG.

"We have also set up 69 passport offices in 64 districts, 33 immigration check posts and passports and visa wings at 75 missions abroad aiming to reach the passport, visa and immigration services to the doorsteps of the people."

She said the government had launched the Machine Readable Passport (MRP) and Machine Readable Visa (MRV) in 2015.

"The MRPs have so far been issued to about 2.7 crore Bangladeshi citizens, while MRVs to 15 lakh foreigners," the PM added.

German Ambassador in Dhaka Peter Fahrenholtz and DIP DG Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed were present at yesterday's programme, chaired by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan.

Later, the home minister formally handed the PM's e-passport to her.

The premier inaugurated e-passport and automated border control management programme by unveiling a plaque.

She also opened the e-passport complex and visited an enrolment booth of the e-gate.

Dancing dragon

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Researchers, including Ashley Poust, a postdoctoral researcher at the San Diego Natural History Museum, later analyzed the fossil (at the time, Poust was still a student at Montana State University).

The findings were published last week in the journal *The Anatomical Record*.

"The new dinosaur fits in with an incredible [range] of feathered, winged animals that are closely related to the origin of birds," Poust, the study's author, said. "Studying specimens like this not only shows us the sometimes surprising paths that ancient life has taken, but also allows us to test ideas about how important bird characteristics, including flight, arose in the distant past."

This dinosaur was a juvenile when it died, according to its bones, but its feathers resembled that of a mature adult. This suggests that the feathers grew quickly, unlike modern birds, which take time to grow their mature feathers.

"Either the young dinosaurs needed these tail feathers for some function we don't know about, or they were growing their feathers really differently from most living birds," Poust said.

The dinosaur was an early relative of Velociraptors, which lived 75 million years ago. Its contemporaries would have been Microraptors, small feathered dinosaurs that resembled birds.

The researchers actually sliced into several bones from the fossil

and studied them with microscopes to understand the different regions of the skeleton. They also compared it to a close relative that also appeared more mature, known as the *Sinornithosaurus*.

Surprisingly, that dinosaur was also still growing when it died. The researchers said that histology, or cutting up the bones, was the only way for them to truly know the life stage of the dinosaurs when they died.

"We're talking about animals that lived twice as long ago as T. rex, so it's pretty amazing how well-preserved they are," Poust said. "It's really very exciting to see inside these animals for the first time."

Fossils from the Jehol Province have painted a portrait of the diverse life that once flourished there. It's an area in northeastern China full of exceptionally preserved fossil discoveries that has been studied for the past 90 years.

Researchers learned that birds, pterosaurs and bird-like dinosaurs all lived in the environment at the same time. This is also when flowering plants initially began to flourish.

"There was a lot of flying, gliding and flapping around these ancient lakes," Poust said.

"As we continue to discover more about the diversity of these small animals, it becomes interesting how they all might have fit into the ecosystem. It was an alien world, but with some of the earliest feathers and earliest flowers, it would have been a pretty one."

Demolition

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Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to take ACs, generators, furniture and other items from the building, said Rajuk sources.

Earlier, Rajuk Chief Engineer ASM Raihanul Ferdous told The Daily Star that the company had been given six months to complete the demolition.

As per an arrangement, the company was supposed to take all the furniture, electronic equipment and other materials from the building, demolish the structure and pay Rajuk Tk 1.55 crore at the end of the work.

But after Rajuk allowed the BGMEA to take the furniture, ACs and generators, the company would now give the development authority Tk 1.02 crore, said Rajuk sources.

The High Court had given the owner three deadlines to vacate the building. The latest deadline expired on April 12 last year.

On April 16, Rajuk went to the BGMEA Bhaban along with policemen and bulldozers, apparently to knock down the building.

People were, however, still inside and the authorities had to pull out for the day. The building was then sealed off.

Talking to reporters at the BGMEA Bhaban yesterday, Housing Minister Rezaul Karim said they were demolishing the building as per a High Court verdict. "All formalities are being done so that there are no legal complications."

He said two teams were working to monitor the work. One of the teams is comprised of representatives from Buet, fire service, army and Urban planning experts, while the other was from Rajuk.

The debris would be removed immediately and eventually dumped somewhere outside the city, he said.

Asked, the minister said they ensured all safety measures for the demolition.

He said they were using the traditional method of demolition as the modern one might cause damage to adjacent buildings as well as pollute the environment.

"With the completion of the work, the water flow of Hatirjheel will finally be restored," he added.

On November 28, 1998, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the building, which was inaugurated by the then prime minister Khaleda Zia on

October 8, 2006.

Later, it was found that the building was constructed illegally.

Following a news report published on October 3 in 2010, an HC bench issued a suo-moto rule on the authorities concerned asking why the building should not be demolished.

On April 3, 2011, a HC bench ordered the demolition of the illegal building. Two days later, the Appellate Division, however, stayed the order for six weeks and asked the BGMEA to file a leave to appeal petition against the verdict.

On March 19, 2013, the HC in its verdict ordered the relevant authorities to demolish the building in three months.

The court also directed the BGMEA to refund money to the buyers of floor space within a year.

In April last year, an Appellate Division bench ordered the BGMEA building be demolished after April 12.

The court termed the building "a cancer in the Hatirjheel project" as it blocked water flow between Hatirjheel lake and Begunbari canal.

Contacted, BGMEA President Rubana Huq yesterday said they respect the court's verdict. "Topmost priority should be given on safety while demolishing the building," she said.

The association has already shifted its headquarters to the capital's Uttara.

4 held

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headquarters in Dhanmondi at 10:30am today.

Seven suspects have been arrested so far in the case.

Two criminals attacked Sarwar, also a physician and prominent cultural activist, at his home in the capital's Uttara on January 5.

Sarwar escaped unhurt but his family members and two neighbours were injured.

Sarwar said a militant group might have carried out the attack. He filed a case with Uttara Paschim Police Station over the incident.

BSF kills

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Lt Colonel Tauhidul Alam, commander officer (CO) of Lalmonirhat 15 BGB Battalion, said they sent a letter to BSF protesting the killing of the two Bangladeshis.