

292 protests held since pandemic hit the country

Says Dhaka University's Centre for Genocide Studies report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 292 protests were held across Bangladesh for different reasons since Covid-19 hit the country in March, said a report of Dhaka University's Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS).

Among those, 96 protests were held for unpaid salaries and Eid bonuses; 55 for demanding relief, aid and food; 39 against lay-offs or closures and pay cuts; 37 for proper medical equipment or against mismanagement in health sector; and 36 over lockdown rules, for accountability, against proposed budget and hike in bus-fares, and for reopening.

Besides, 17 protests took place for waiver of rent or tuition fees, and 11 against irregularities in relief, aid and food distribution.

CGS shared the report styled "Covid-19 Graphics" with the media yesterday. It is the 20th edition of a report series by Bangladesh Peace Observatory, a CGS

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The water in the moat surrounding the Bangabandhu Square Monument in Gulistan is filled up to the brims by trash. Whereas an installation such as this one should make people feel glorious, there's this depressing aura all around the monument. This photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK

2 ministers downplay design flaw of viaduct

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY, back from Munshiganj

With the cabinet division having already directed Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP) authority to redesign viaducts due to the poor vertical and horizontal clearance, the railways minister, who visited the site along with planning minister yesterday, tried to down play the problem.

Planning Minister MA Mannan and Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon, however, told reporters -- who were invited to the visit -- there that consultants and Buet experts are working to solve the "design-related issue that arose recently."

"It is not the proper time to say that fault [in design] has been detected... It has not been settled yet whether there was fault [in design]," Sujon said. Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project (PMBP) authorities expressed serious concerns because the designed viaducts for rail use have left too little clearance for tall vehicles that might use the roads underneath.

PMBP officials said construction of viaducts with the existing vertical limit will hamper movement of heavy lorries or loaded vehicles and the existing horizontal limit will shrink the width of the connecting roads of the country's longest bridge.

Amid this situation, cabinet division last week directed PBRLP to redesign the viaducts.

A panel of experts led by Prof Shamim Z Bosunia, chairman of the government's panel of experts on PMBP, has been assigned to solve the design-related problem.

Rail link authorities claimed that the problem regarding vertical clearance actually arose over pier 25(1) and 25(2), and their contractor is redesigning it now. The problem is nothing major, they said.

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Juvenile sibling rivalry gone too far

Four-yr-old in Karail was killed by brother 'out of jealousy': Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four-year old Nusrat Jahan Mim, whose body was found in a bathroom at Karail slum in Dhaka on Wednesday, was killed by her elder brother, said Rab.

He strangled her "out of jealousy" while she was sleeping, as he felt his sister was loved more by their parents, Rab-1 assistant director Md Kamruzzaman quoted the 14-year-old as saying yesterday.

A team of Rab-1 arrested him from the slum, he told The Daily Star.

During primary interrogation, the fifth-grader of a local school, told Rab that he thought his parents' love for him started to wane after his sister was born.

The boy used to think that his parents became indifferent

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Tricked and trafficked into Brunei

Brokers offer 'work visas' from fake companies to send Bangladeshis to the oil-rich country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To change his and his family's fortune, Zia Mollah flew to Brunei on October 30 last year after collecting Tk 3.20 lakh expense by selling land and sister-in-law's gold ornaments.

But soon after he landed in the country, his passport was seized by a group of brokers. Although they were supposed to provide job and residence, they left Zia abandoned.

While Zia and some other Bangladeshis were trying to survive there after renting a house in Darussalam of Brunei, law enforcers arrested them as illegal immigrants.

Zia had to stay in jail for seven days.

He said he was tortured in the country, as police wanted to know how he entered Brunei without documents.

Finally, he got released on a special pass with the help of an interpreter. They told him to collect his passport from the brokers.

Zia contacted them but they sought money for it.

He informed his family in Bangladesh about the situation. They had to take a loan of around Tk 1.20 lakh from different NGOs and send it to him so that he can pay the brokers and come back home.

Zia returned to Bangladesh on January 2.

He shared his experience with The Daily Star at the office of Rab-3 on Wednesday.

His elder brother Nasir Mollah said their father is a rickshaw-puller and he works as a support staff at a private bank.

"We thought once we send Zia abroad, the condition of our family would improve, but we are now struggling to repay the loans we took," said Nasir.

The siblings gathered at the Rab office after learning that the elite force has arrested three persons, including the one who sent Zia to Brunei and took money from them.

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MJF providing cash support to 23,000 poor households

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has begun distributing cash assistance to some 23,000 Covid-19 affected marginalised households in 38 districts through a three-month emergency cash transfer initiative, under the Excluded People's Rights in Bangladesh (EPR) Programme, supported by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

In the first phase, beginning September 17, MJF is distributing Tk 57.5 million to 23,000 households in 38 priority districts, which have high concentration of marginalised and excluded people in poverty-prone locations, according to a press release.

The households, left out of social safety net coverage, were selected on priority basis for this cash support. The beneficiaries were selected through a multi-tier selection

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Grabbers eye land of Sylhet Catholic diocese

Bishop urges police to beef up security after miscreants vandalise property; 2 accused sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Some local influential are allegedly trying to grab a land belonging to the Catholic diocese in Sylhet.

On Monday morning, some of their hired goons intruded into the property in Porgonabazar area of Sylhet Sadar upazila and threatened the staffers of the church, said witnesses.

They also uprooted around 50 trees planted marking Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth centenary and demanded Tk 25 lakh.

The Catholic community in Sylhet is perturbed by such intimidation and the staff members and workers of the diocese are now living amid fear. They have also asked police for protection.

According to the bishop's office, a total of 2.45 acres of land were bought during 2013-2015 to build a school, clinic and other structures, adjacent to the bishop's residence and office.

But over the years, a group of land grabbers supported by local miscreants are eyeing the land, said office staffers.

Following Monday's incident, Father

Saroj Costa, office in-charge of the Sylhet Catholic Diocese at the bishop's office, filed a case with Shahporan Police Station, accusing 19 named and several unnamed persons.

That very night, police arrested two accused -- Azizur Rahman of Khunirchak and Israili Ali of Kallagram -- in Sylhet Sadar upazila.

Sub-inspector Ripton Purkayastha, the case's investigation officer, said, "The accused have been sent to jail after they appeared before a court on September 22."

Meanwhile, local businessman Israk Ali, the prime accused in the case, has still not been arrested.

Contacted yesterday, he said the land belonged to him and his family for years and hung up. His number was found switched off afterwards.

Asked, police said they were trying to arrest all the accused.

Meanwhile, Bishop Bejoy N D'Cruze, chief of Sylhet Catholic Diocese, wrote a letter to the police commissioner (Sylhet) on Monday requesting security and

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MURDER OF SAVAR SCHOOLGIRL

Not a one-off crime

Plenty of allegations against Mizan; 'got shelter from local AL'

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Four days after the murder of Savar schoolgirl Nila Roy, information about the dubious past of prime accused Mizanur Rahman (20) has started to surface. Mizan, who allegedly stabbed Nila in an abandoned house owned by his father on Sunday night, has turned out to be a member of "Shakil and Sakib" gang.

Members of the gang are infamous for extorting people and businesses, and often involve in stalking girls and drug trade, alleged locals of Savar's Dakkhin Para.

Speaking to The Daily Star, they said Shakil and Sakib are sons of Awami League joint secretary of Savar Municipality Shirajul Islam Shiru.

They said if any victim took the issues to Shiru, they would face stern warnings and even threats, which prevented people from protesting the gang's crimes.

Seeking anonymity, a victim who was beaten by the gang told this correspondent they came after him after he refused them extortion money.

"When I took it up with Shiru and demanded justice, he asked me to come over to his residence. I went there with my landlord. He confined us to a room and threatened us and forbade to talk about this with anyone," the victim said.

Meanwhile, a Savar local alleged that 10 hours before Nila's murder, Mizan and Shakib stalked another girl in front of the abandoned house. At one stage, Shakib even assaulted the girl.

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MINI BYTES

Have smartphones reached peak design?

E RAZA RONNY

Smartphones seem to be stuck after achieving an evolutionary height. Every device is a large rectangular slab usually black. Some argue that the form has achieved the ultimate mix of perfection and functionality. It is very likely true but that does not stop designers trying to wow the consumer one more time.



SAMSUNG FLIPPING OUT ON THE COMPETITION

Take the Samsung Z Flip. It is a nearly a square device that flips open to reveal a display folded in half. Released in February 2020, this has all the flagship specs with a Snapdragon 855 processor, Adreno 650 GPU and 8GB of RAM. Unfolded, it's a 6.7-inch display. Quite right by today's standards. When you fold it though, it's 17.3mm thick which is basically the same thickness as a classic Nokia 1200.

It launched for USD 1380. We've seen units selling here in Bangladesh for BDT 1,42,000. It tries to bring back the novelty of flip phones from the early 2000's where 'cool' people would have got additional points for flipping open a phone with style. The Z Flip doesn't quite cut the cake as it is too close to being a square and looks more like a vanity mirror.

Samsung also has a similar device called the Fold which, er, folds vertically and has the range topping Snapdragon 855 chipset. Huawei did the folding act too but not as well while the Microsoft Surface Duo utilizes two screens separated by a hinge and can rotate 360 degrees.

MOTOROLA TRYING TO REGAIN THE CROWN

The cool flip benchmark though has been set back in 2004 by the Motorola RAZRV3. All aluminum, this was the coolest thing in the world of phones. It sold over 130 million units making it the best-selling flip phone ever. In 2019 the rebirth came in the form of the Moto RAZR 2019, leaving you with no confusion. It looked superb, possibly still the best looking flip



phone in the market. The device closes satisfyingly and has a nearly zero gap between screens when closed. Folded up, it had nearly the same thickness as the original (13.9mm versus 14mm now). But the reception was lackluster after the specs rolled out. The Snapdragon 710, small 2510 mAh battery and average cameras didn't help. At about BDT 1,25,000 it came with a few squeaks when closing or opening. Even though Motorola stated it went through rigorous stress tests, it's scary how fragile that fancy OLED screen feels. An updated RAZR is due soon.



LG WANTS TO GIVE YOU WINGS

LG went an untried route with their new Wing, unveiled just last week. Remember reality beding Neo from The Matrix movie? He had a cool Nokia 8110 that would slide open to reveal, er, more phone. LG Wing slides up an entire screen out from the back to form a T shape. You get two screens so that you never ever look up from your device, forever shackled. Very cool concept though and durability testing lasted over 200,000 swivels, close to 100 motions daily for five years. While the processor is not the top tier (Snapdragon 765) LG hopes to make a mark with its supposedly stellar camera setup. The start being a 64 MP, f/1.8 main camera for a whole lot of light promising very, very sharp photos. Hold it like an old-school handycam and shoot videos. Current retail prices are suggested at around \$940 when it ships out to South Korea in October.



Rupnagar slum in the capital's Mirpur, where a devastating blaze devoured around 400 shanties six months ago, is back to its old self. The same tin structures have been erected again, with faulty pipes and wires providing illegal gas and power lines, snaking its way into all homes. Authorities had formed a body to investigate the disaster, but looking at the present scenario, it's evident that not enough has been done to prevent another tragedy like March 11. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

