

Human rights

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Among the politicians subjected to harassment are Awami League leaders Tofail Ahmed, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Mukul Bose, Shafi Ahmed, Bahauddin Nasim, Talukder Abdul Khalek, Liakat Shikder, Nazrul Islam Babu and others. Some other political leaders were also arrested without any specific charge and detained. All of them were severely tortured during police remand.

Shahriar and Saber were arrested twice and are now in jail, while Bahauddin Nasim has been in prison since his arrest ten months back.

The government has misused and, in some cases, even bent the law while dealing with them. There are evidences that the government purposely detained some of them.

For instance, after his arrest under Section 54, Bahauddin Nasim was placed on a five-day remand. However, he was on remand for two additional days and the police defied the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court order that had asked them to produce Bahauddin before the court upon expiry of the remand.

Later, he was made accused in three separate cases. But as Bahauddin got bail in all these cases, the government sent him to jail on a month's detention on November 18. And when the detention neared end, the government increased it by 90 more days on December 15. Last Monday, the High Court declared this order illegal.

Similarly, the High Court granted Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir bail in six cases. In each case, the government bought time by delaying in sending the bail order to the jail authorities and implicated him in a new case in the interregnum. Alamgir was eventually released on September 18 after a long-drawn legal battle and six months in prison.

The president, general secretary and another top-ranking leader of the AL-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League went through similar predicament. Arrested under Section 54, the three were shown arrested in new cases whenever they got bail and were about to step out of prison. They were implicated in six separate cases and kept behind bars for seven months.

Former state minister Talukder Abdul Khalek was similarly shown arrested in three cases one after another whenever the High Court granted him bail.

Tofail Ahmed's case was altogether different. Although covered by a High Court that prohibited his arrest till March 4, 2003 without any specific charge, the former industries minister was arrested and sent to jail on a month's detention.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury was first arrested on October 20 and later released on a High Court bail on November 20. On December 8 he was arrested again under Section 54. This time, however, although High Court granted him bail, he was sent to prison on a month's detention.

Muntasir was arrested under Section 54. Although the High Court granted him bail and there is no case against him, the eminent columnist was detained for a month.

Shahriar, meanwhile, was implicated in a seditious case upon his arrest. He, too, obtained bail from the High Court but was nonetheless detained under the SPA.

The same was the fate for Saleem. The freelance journalist also got bail from the High Court on December 23 but was sent anyway to prison next day on a month's detention. Yesterday, a writ was moved with the High Court challenging his detention.

In each case, different wings of the government flouted the law of the land. In the case of Saber, Shahriar and Muntasir, the police even went to the extent of ignoring High Court nullifying their remand orders. Also, while the High Court instructed the magistrate's court to record Saber's statement, it was not done.

Similarly, police did not obey the court when asked to produce Saleem and Pricilla before the court on expiry of their remand.

The Constitution guarantees an arrestee's right to a counsel. It also says that a person must produced before court within 24 hours of his or her arrest and that no person shall be tortured. It also makes mandatory that magistrate's court obey High Court orders and the police obey the order of the magistrate's court.

However, in none of the cases mentioned above, the magistrate's court obeyed the High Court orders, nor did the police obey the orders of the magistrate's court.

These cases, legal experts believe, reflect the government's negative attitude towards carrying out court order and augur a worsening trend of human rights violation.

The legal experts have said on many occasions that the state was created to protect the fundamental human rights.

The administration, police, magistrate and courts were created to protect these rights, as guaranteed in the Constitution. However, the government is misusing the administration to violate these rights.

Friendly ties with all not at the cost of neighbours: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition party, Awami League, considers that Bangladesh should foster its relationship with all countries of the world without "compromising" friendly ties with its close neighbours.

Talking to the press at a city hotel yesterday, the newly elected International Affairs Secretary of the party Syed Abul Hossain said, "Better cooperation means greater development."

Hossain did not see "any problem" in Bangladesh's recent focus on the countries in the east -- China, Thailand and Myanmar -- as long it continues its traditional friendly relationship with the neighbours.

Replying to a question regarding any possible fallout of this move on Indo-Bangla relations, he said,

"We've to observe further whether Indo-Bangla relationship is deteriorating or not. If the government wishes we are always ready to help it in cementing relations with all neighbours."

In this regard he stressed on the need for Bangladesh' more active role in enlivening the regional cooperation caucus, SAARC.

Syed Abul Hossain welcomed the prime minister's recent China visit but was critical about closure of the office of the Economic Minister at Bangladesh's mission in China.

On Bangladesh's signing of a defence cooperation agreement with China during the visit, the AL leader said, "Since I have not seen the terms and other details of the agreement it would be premature for me to comment on it. However, Awami League, in general, wel-

comes all forms of interstate cooperation."

He said, "We are not in a position to comment on what the government is telling the press about the defence cooperation agreement with China". The government should divulge the contents of the agreement and "the issue should be discussed in the next session of the parliament," he said.

All important issues including international agreements should be discussed in the parliament. "I regret to say that such a culture has not developed in the country."

Hossain, also a former minister, informed that the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and AL chief Sheikh Hasina might undertake a visit to China sometime in the first half of 2003 at the invitation of the Chinese government.

18 'listed criminals' held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighty-six people including 18 'listed criminals' were arrested from different parts of the country by the joint forces in the last 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

They include journalist Khairul of the Dainik Prabartan of Khulna, arrested from Paikgacha.

Khairul was taken to custody on Monday night and later shown arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), our staff correspondent reported from Khulna.

The joint forces also recovered 11 firearms including two pistols, four pipe guns, four shotguns and nine bullet in their country-wide anti-crime drive during the period.

With these, the number of people arrested since start of the drive on October 17 rose to 10,555 including 2,315 'listed criminals' and that of recovered firearms to 1,924.

Our Pabna correspondent reported that ten people including Pabna Paurosabha Chairman

Mosharrar Hossain, Awami League leader and industrialist Latif Biswas and BNP leader Jahirul Islam Bishu were arrested from the town.

Mosharrar was arrested for his alleged involvement in the killing of the then Paurasabha chairman Sheikh Shahidullah in 1996. He was produced before a court, which sent him to jail.

The joint forces arrested Union Parishad chairman Abu Sayed Khan and six others from different areas of the Sadar upazila and 'listed criminal' Maruf Parvez from Babupura upazila in Iswardi.

A Chinese rifle along with 149 bullets and two pairs of black dresses were recovered after digging the yard of Abu Sayed's house.

In Satkhira, the joint forces arrested Tala upazila Jubo Dal President Badruzzaman from a tea stall at Patkelghata bazaar. Police said Badruzzaman, an aspiring chairman candidate in the coming Union Parishad election, is a 'listed criminal'. He was handed over to

police. In Khulna, another 37 people including four alleged outlaws were arrested from different parts of the district. Two firearms were also recovered.

The alleged outlaws are Shyama Parashad Mallik, 35, Pinak Kumar Mallik, 46, Ashim Paddar, 35 and Khalil Shaikh, 32 -- all armed cadres of Biplobi Communist party, police claimed.

In Rajshahi, the joint forces arrested BNP leader Mafiz Uddin, who is also chairman of Saranjai Union Parishad in Tanore upazila.

Police said Mafiz, accused in over 30 cases including those of rape, was caught from Tanore UNO office premises.

In Lalmonirhat town, Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Kalam and four other persons -- Afzal, Zahedul Islam and Selim-- were arrested.

Iqbal, 23 others

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CMM's Court and the court recorded it.

Officials at the General Recording Office (GRO) of the CMM's Court also expressed deep concern over the reports.

Besides Iqbal, the chargesheeted are Kiran, Dulal alias Laundry Dulal, Abdul Halim, Khorshed Alam alias Ashrafuzzaman, Pichchi Hannan alias Chhoto Hannan, Imdadul Haque alias Bachchu, Moniruzzaman, Liakat Hossain, Mohammad Monir Hossain, Tareq Shamsul Khan alias Himu, Shawkat Hossain alias Nannu, Kamrul Hasan alias Hannan, Kabiruddin Ahmed, SM Arman, Nurunnabi Chowdhury alias Shaon, Abul Bashar, Kamrul Morshed Khan alias Khoka, Golam Mostafa alias Haji Rahmat Ali, Jasim Uddin, GM Ziaul Haque alias Shamim Gazi, Babul alias Kala Babul, Munshi Kamruzzaman alias Kajal and Abdus Salam.

Pichchi Hannan and seven others are absconding, eight are now in jail custody and one accused, Abdul Halim, has become an 'approver' in the case.

The IO prayed for issuance of warrant of arrest against the absconders and attachment of their moveable property.

In the charge sheet, 79 people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

In the case, filed with the Motijheel Police Station on February 13, 2001, it was alleged that four persons including a policeman were killed and four others were bullet-it when activists of the then ruling AL opened fire on an opposition procession during hartal on the day in the city's Malibagh area. The hartal was called by the four-party opposition alliance demanding immediate resignation of the AL government.

The case was filed accusing more than 150 people including Iqbal. The then IO of the case had submitted a charge sheet against five persons -- Pichchi Hannan and four others -- on July 12, 2001.

When the four-party alliance came to power, the home ministry ordered further investigation into the case.

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Murders drop, still way high

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armed attack, a sequel to intra-party rivalry, at Tongi Bazar on January 24.

Three suspected muggers, who shot two employees of a private firm and snatched away Tk 2.60 lakh, were burnt to death by a mob in city's Motijheel commercial area on January 28.

Schoolboy Khandaker Shihab Ahmed 13, was kidnapped for ransom and murdered after he recognised one of the kidnapers who happened to be a resident of his locality. The incident came to light on April 1, 53 days after the boy was killed. Four people were awarded the death penalty by a court on July 17.

Schoolgirl Mahima 15, of Kanthalbaria village of Puthia in Rajshahi, was abducted and gang raped by four youths identified as activists of the Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) in the afternoon of February 15. The rapists also took photograph of the beastly act. Mahima committed suicide on February 19. Police submitted the charge sheet in the Mahima gang rape case, showing three of the four accused absconding. A special court sentenced to death all the four accused in the Mahima kidnap and rape case on October 9.

Sheikh Harun-ur-Rashid of Dainik Purbachal was shot dead by unidentified gunmen on his way to office in Khulna City on March 2. On

March 4, masked armed bandits, in a commando style operation, looted money and prize bonds from a bank vault and its cash counter at Manik Miah Avenue in the city.

Jamaluddin Fakir, a college student and a member of the Kapasia unit of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), and president of Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Smriti library, was picked up by police and allegedly tortured to death inside the Kapasia Police Station in the morning of April 19.

Ganojaoti Mohasthobir, a Buddhist monk in-charge of Hoara Puyan Buddha Bihar, was slain in a temple in Hingla village under Raozan Thana in Chittagong on April 22.

A 20-month-old baby died in her father's lap as a stray bullet fired by fleeing snatchers hit her in the head at Badda in the city on May 9. Four were chargesheeted in the baby Naushin murder case on August 21.

Saidur Rahman Newton, a newly elected ward commissioner of Mirpur, was killed and two of his aides were wounded at Dhanmondi in the city on May 9.

Rafiqul Islam, a policeman, and a member of Ansar were gunned down by drug peddlers in two incidents in the city on May 13.

The government decided to deploy one platoon of BDR at each police station for a joint drive with police and Ansar to net notorious criminals and improve law and order

on May 13. A young butcher of Narayanganj, who was picked up by detectives on May 7, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on May 18.

JCD leader Sagir Hossain and his friend Asaduzzaman Ritu were gunned down at Nazrul Islam Road in Mohammadpur area on May 19.

Two under-trial prisoners died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital following alleged police torture. The victims are Awami League leader and a union parishad member, Fazlul Huq Bhuiyan 40, who died at the DMCH on May 20.

Rickshawpuller Mohammad Alam was picked up by DB police and handed over to Kamrangirchar police. He died at the DMCH on May 20.

A BNP-backed ward commissioner of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Binoy Krisna Sarkar Bina was gunned down at Sharma Patti of Tanti Bazaar in the old part of the city on May 22.

Expatriate Abdul Hye, who had just returned home from Malaysia, died after muggers threw him out of a taxicab at Natunbazar in the city's Badda area on May 31.

Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), during an anti-crime drive on June 1, beat to death a fish trader, Mohammad Soheli, at Swarighat in Lalbagh area. The victim's mother filed a case, but she was allegedly forced by the police to withdraw it.

MoU on free access to Canada signed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh gets duty- and quota-free access to Canada for all goods except a few items like dairy, egg, poultry and farm products from today.

The general declaration for duty- and quota-free access to Canada for all least developed countries (LDCs) came in last June.

But a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two countries making the decision effective yesterday. Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed and Canadian High Commissioner in Dhaka Gerry Campbell signed the MoU on behalf of their respective countries.

Minister for commerce Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, State Minister Bahkt Ullah Bulu and other high officials representing both the countries were present during the signing ceremony at the ministry.

Bangladesh hopes that its export to Canada would grow by about 200-300 million dollars annually due to this duty free and quota free facilities.

The commerce minister termed the facilities as a big success of the government's diplomatic efforts. "We had to go for strong lobbying as there were some propaganda against us. A vested quarter had tried prevent Bangladesh from the facilities," Khosru said while talking to some newsmen.

He observed that the duty and quota free access to Canada would help Bangladesh in expanding its export items and open a new window for North American markets.

It would also help in lessening the country's export dependencies on the USA and Europe, he said. Beside garments and knitwear, export items in other sectors like

light engineering sector would get a boost, the minister added.

Bangladesh have maintained a good trade balance with Canada. During the 2001-2002 fiscal it earned \$111.79 million from export to Canada and imported \$47.79 million worth of goods from there.

The major export items to Canada include ready made garments, jute products, leather footwear, shrimp handicrafts, ceramic products, tents, carpets and printed materials.

The major import items from Canada to Bangladesh are live animals, animal products, vegetables products, prepared food items, mineral products, products of chemical and allied industries, plastic, paper and paper board, precious stones, machinery and transport equipment.

EC writes

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mar the festive mood of the polls. Moreover, since the UP polls span over nearly two months, army deployment is practically impossible, they feel. Resource constraint is also something to be kept in mind.

Asked to comment on Monday's decision by the EC, Election Commissioner M Munsef Ali told reporters yesterday, "As it falls in the Election Commission's jurisdiction, the Commission decided to deploy army in the Union Prisdad polls. Since there is no bar to deploy members of the armed forces in such elections, we want army to be deployed in the ensuing elections".

Ali said Monday's decision was unanimous. Representatives in the law and order review meeting appraised the EC their prospect and problems.

He admitted that due to special drive by the joint forces, law and order has improved. But the EC does not know how long the army would be in the field. "That's why, we want army to be deployed."

Until yesterday, no communication was made to the EC from the government, sources in the EC said. Constitutionally, it is the responsibility of executives to help the EC to carry out its activities, they said.

The EC and the government first met head-on over the UP polls when the government deferred the polls by two months without informing the EC, which wanted the elections to be held from January 7. Later, the EC shifted its stance and deferred the polls by three weeks.

Purbachal project

2,969 NRBs on preliminary list

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 2,969 expatriate Bangladeshis have been primarily selected for allocation of plots in the Purbachal New City Development Project.

The final list of non-resident Bangladeshis, who will be allotted plots in the Tk 2,000 crore Rajuk project, will be published in the newspapers shortly. The plots will likely be handed over in mid-February.

"The government expects investment to the tune of \$800 in the housing sector through this project over the next ten years," said Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas as he briefed newsmen on the project yesterday.

Expatriates dropped 3,399 or 12.5 per cent of total applications for plots in the township project. Of these, 430 were rejected on such technical grounds as mistakes in application forms and failure to meet the Rajuk criteria.

However, the minister said these applications would be considered on priority basis and proper steps would be taken upon scrutiny so that all NRBs could be included in the project.

The Rajuk earlier marked out 1,000 plots for expatriate Bangladeshis. However, as the

applications from the NRBs exceeded the quota, the government decided at the directive of the prime minister to allocate plots to them on priority basis, the minister said.

The highest number of NRB application was from the United States (1,115). There were applications from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Kuwait, Qatar, Canada, Italy, Australia, Oman, Japan, Singapore and some other countries.

Scrutiny of a total of 27,099 applications for the project would be completed by mid-February, Abbas told the briefing.

State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Quamrul Islam, Housing and Public Works Secretary M Amnur Rahman and Rajuk Chairman Iqbaluddin Chowdhury were also at the briefing among others.

Quamrul said the NAM apartments would be allotted to the NRBs on priority basis.

Iqbaluddin said about Tk 700 crore will be required for land filling in the project site.

"A total of 4,500 acres of land have already been acquired and preparation for the rest is on," he said. "Each katha of land will cost Tk 1.5 to 2 lakh."

A whiff of fresh air

FROM PAGE 1

In 1995, the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) and the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST) filed a public interest litigation with the High Court for establishing citizens' rights to breathe fresh air.

In 1996, the Awami League (AL) government also took an initiative to ban the polluters. The Auto-rickshaw Owners and Drivers Association had a two-month talks with the government regarding the ban. And finally, the government backed out from its decision despite getting popular support for the move.

Later, the AL government increased duty on spares of two-stroke vehicles by 200 per cent. But the whole exercise turned futile when the government allowed

import of a huge number of polluters through one of the state-owned banks.

Later, following a writ by BELA and the BLAST, the High Court passed an order on March 27, 2002, which included eight directives to the different departments of the government. Banning the polluters was one of them.

Following the High Court order, the government banned 12,500 two-stroke three-wheelers in the first phase on September 1. Only 6,575 polluters were allowed to ply the city roads till December 31.

According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the auto-rickshaws popularly known as 'baby taxi' were first introduced in the city in 1955 and in 1978, auto-tempos came. In 1955, only 25 auto-

rickshaws were launched. Meantime, with the ban in effect from today, owners were seen shipping their vehicles to small towns.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) will deploy some alternative vehicles in the city streets to reduce the sufferings of the commuters because of the ban. The BRTC will introduce some 200 human haulers, 500 CNG-run auto-rickshaws, 50 taxicabs, and 500 Chinese four-stroke three-wheelers this month.

Besides, some private organisations will also deploy some vehicles. Nitol Motors will deploy 800 four-stroke auto-rickshaws this month. Uttara Motors has been permitted to import 4,000 CNG-run auto-rickshaws from India.

Cost of living up by 8.5pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cost of living increased by 8.52 per cent last year while prices of essentials and house rent shot up by 4.72 per cent, according to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

The CAB also mentioned that the cost of living increased by 5.42 per cent in 2001 while the prices of essentials increased by 1.40 per cent.

The CAB survey found that prices of agricultural products remained at a higher level throughout the year.

The price of rice increased by 3.89 per cent, flour 3.58 per cent, edible oil 7.65 per cent, vegetables 12.81 per cent and powder milk 11.69 per cent.

House rent shot up by 13.49 per cent, gas price by 22.79 per cent, and water and electricity tariff by 8.13 per cent.

However, the prices of eggs, broiler chicken, and fish decreased by 5.27 per cent, 8.75 per cent and 10.29 per cent respectively in 2002.

White Panel sweeps DUTA polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The White Panel, backed by the BNP and the Jamaat, bagged 10 executive posts, including that of president and general secretary, in the Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA) elections held yesterday.

White Panel candidates Prof. Mohammad Asaduzzaman, Dean of the Arts Faculty, and Prof. Yarul Kabir, Provost of Fazlul Haq Hall, were elected president and general secretary of the association.

The AL-backed Blue Panel got five posts including the post of joint secretary.

One thousand and sixteen teachers cast their votes in the elections held at the University Teachers Club.

The newly elected president, Prof. Mohammad Asaduzzaman got 534 votes, while his rival Prof. Kazi Shahidullah got 483 votes.

Vice-President Prof. Abul Khair got 548 votes and his rival Prof. Hossain Mansur bagged 446 votes. Treasurer Dr. Mohammad Serajul Islam bagged 571 votes and his opponent Blue Panel candidate Khandokar Mohammad Ashraf Hossain 421 votes.

The new general secretary, Prof. Yarul Kabir, got 510 votes and his opponent Dr. Anwar Hossain 492 votes.

Scrap SPA

FROM PAGE 12

specific charges against all the arrestees, but they are not being charged. Yet, they are being remanded and tortured. "Such acts are surely unjust," she noted.

The law minister admitted that the SPA has scopes to be abused and is abused and that all the governments in the past misused it to various degrees. "But we should be careful about not using it at random. Our government is well aware of it," he said.

He informed the press that his ministry had gathered opinions of the Law Commission regarding the SPA and the government was looking into the recommendations.

The Law Commission on May 15 sent a set of recommendations on the SPA to the law ministry. Since then, the Law Minister has been saying that the government was considering the matter.