

Thai army, protesters committing 'serious abuses': watchdog

AFP, Bangkok

Both Thai security forces and anti-government "Red Shirt" protesters have committed "serious abuses" during an army crackdown on street rallies in the capital, a leading rights organisation said yesterday.

New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said it was "gravely concerned" about actions of both protesters and the Thai army in central Bangkok, where at least 45 people have died in clashes since last week.

"The situation in Bangkok has spun out of control because of wrongful action on both sides," Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at HRW, said in a statement.

"We urge both sides to respect and provide access for emergency medical personnel and fire fighters, cease the unlawful use of lethal force and ensure safe passage for people trying to flee the violence."

"Anti-government militants should immediately stop targeting journalists," he added.

An Italian freelance photographer, Fabio Polenghi, 45, was among those shot dead Wednesday as the Thai military moved to break up the Reds' encampment, which had stretched for several kilometres in a commercial district.

Several other journalists were wounded in the clashes, including Dutch television reporter Michel Maas, who was shot in the shoulder, and Canadian Chandler Vandergrift, who was badly injured in a grenade attack.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on Thursday accused Thai authorities of temporarily blocking social networking websites Facebook and Twitter, which served as news sources while TV stations aired only government

JS body

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On May 16, the education ministry handed over all related documents to Prime Minister's Education Adviser Dr Alauddin Ahmed, following disappointments among lawmakers regarding the list's creation.

When Menon's attention was drawn to that fact, he said, "The adviser is going through the documents in line with the prime minister's directive, but it is not the task of the adviser to finalise it."

At the committee meeting in Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid came under heavy criticism of its members who alleged that some officials of the ministry were certainly involved in irregularities while the list was being prepared, two members told The Daily Star afterwards.

Menon said the education ministry claims some of the new institutions were included based on letters of demand order from a number of lawmakers, while those lawmakers claim they never sent any such letter. On the other hand some other lawmakers are claiming that there demand orders were ignored by the ministry, he added.

Menon also said Nahid assured the committee that if inclusion of any new institution is proven to be tainted by irregularities, his ministry will cancel that. The education minister however declined to talk to reporters after the meeting.

The parliamentary watchdog also heavily criticised the finance ministry for the latter's "intervention" in the process of creating the list. The finance ministry through a circular had asked the education ministry to form an inter-ministerial committee for including no more than 1,000 new institutions.

"The finance ministry does not have the right to make such suggestions," Menon said yesterday.

After a gap of six years the government on May 7 published a list of 1,022 institutions to be added to the existing MPO recipients.

But in the face of vehement opposition from some lawmakers, the prime minister in a cabinet meeting directed the education ministry to review it before making it functional. She at the same time directed her adviser, Dr Alauddin, to review the list as well.

Currently, around 26,340 institutions including 2,386 colleges, 15,515 secondary schools, 7,344 madrasas, and 1,095 technical institutions are receiving MPOs.

programming. The media watchdog also criticised Red Shirt demonstrators for setting fire to Thailand's Channel 3 television during Wednesday's violence, saying most Thai reporters chose not to cover events out of real fears of being targeted.

Canal lost

FROM PAGE 1
The World Bank is funding the conservation of four canals in and around Dhaka city by the government.

The Khilgaon-Bashabo Canal is one of the four.

"The remaining open portion of the canal will be excavated under the project," said engineer Habibullah of the drainage department of Dhaka Wasa.

Under the project, the authorities will make concrete the banks and the canal bed.

"This time the canals will not be covered," the engineer said.

The project is expected to be complete within 18 months with an estimated cost of Tk 29 crore.

Dhaka Wasa had earlier taken initiatives in line with a decision of the last caretaker government to recover 26 out of 43 canals from encroachers.

Hasina warns

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officials to look after their problems.

In response to harassment the expatriates face at the Dhaka airport, Hasina said she would ensure safety and comfort of the expatriates.

She said the government has undertaken training programmes for the intending immigrant workers to learn foreign languages and laws so that they do not face any problem after arriving in a foreign country.

Besides, the PM said machine-readable passport is being introduced to check fraud with passports and data bank set up to keep information of all expatriate workers.

Moreover, she said the Expatriate Bank is being set up to grant loans to immigrant workers, so they would not need to sell their lands and property in future.

Hasina urged the expatriates to send remittance through banking channels avoiding 'hundi' and make investment in Bangladesh.

She said the government will set up economic zones for investment by the expatriates. Besides, there will be expatriates' quota for plots and flats.

Praising the hardworking Bangladeshi expatriates, Hasina said each expatriate is an ambassador of Bangladesh in a foreign country and they should work to enhance the country's image abroad.

She said current foreign reserve has exceeded \$10 billion and the credit goes to the expatriate Bangladeshis.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan, among others, spoke at the reception.

Meanwhile, the PM returned home last night ending her five-day visit to South Korea and Malaysia.

Last batch

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seamen went to Benin with jobs in a Greece-based shipping company, Golden Shipping SA. But, the company did not pay them salaries.

After repeated requests, the company gave return tickets to some 30 of the seamen, leaving 28 others marooned in ships off the coast.

Bangladesh's Chargé d'Affaires in Morocco Lutfar Rahman held a robust negotiation with the Benin authorities as to the return of all the stranded seamen.

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment met the expenses of the seamen's stay in a Benin hotel and the Department of Shipping is paying for their return home.

Rejoinder

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of the saplings overnight. A case was filed against the suspects with local police station."

OUR REPLY
Our report dealt with continuous plundering of forest in the name of ruling party during various regimes. It's not regime specific.

The rejoinder itself described how 'vested quarters' uprooted a majority of 5,000 saplings planted in October 2009.

So the claim that destruction only took place during previous regimes is negated by the rejoinder.

The rejoinder does not disprove our report in anyway. Therefore, we stand by our report.

BCL president 'assaulted'

by party man
DU CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League President Mahmud Hasan Ripon was allegedly assaulted last night by a Mymensingh district unit BCL leader as he was not picked for the post of district unit president.

The BCL leader however denied the incident, occurred at a restaurant in the capital's Dhanmondi.

"Akhtaruzzaman Akhtar, the Mymensingh district unit leader, slapped Ripon in a restaurant where Akhtar came to meet the BCL president," a BCL activist who was accompanying Ripon said.

"Akhtar asked Ripon why he was ignored for the post of local unit president," a witness said.

"Ripon threatened me to hand over to police if I make any question further," Akhtar told The Daily Star.

"I slapped Ripon as he assaulted me at first," he added.

Contacted, Ripon told The Daily Star, "I do not know anyone named Akhtar and no one assaulted me."

Purchase of 70,000 tonnes wheat okayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet committee on purchase yesterday approved import of 70,000 tonnes of wheat to increase food stock in the country.

An official of the cabinet division said it would take around Tk 116.18 crore to import the wheat.

Planning Minister Air Vice Marshal (ret) AK Khandker chaired the meeting held at the cabinet division.

According to the food ministry proposal, current food stock of the government has declined by 52 percent.

Food stock was 5.53 lakh tonnes in May 10, which was 8.44 lakh tonnes in the same period last year.

The government had set a target of purchasing 7 lakh tonnes of wheat in current fiscal year but it has succeeded in importing 6 lakh tonnes till now, said sources in the food ministry.

The government had earlier decided to import 3 lakh tonnes of wheat from Russia but it will take more time to complete all the formalities of import.

A high official of food ministry said they are not concerned about the current food stock as the government expects to get 12 lakh tonnes of rice during the current boro season.

Many in BNP

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Finally on Tuesday night she held a crucial meeting with the party's few mid-level leaders where she, for the first time, disclosed that she was going to announce a dawn-to-dusk hartal from Wednesday's rally.

At the meeting Khaleda wanted those leaders to assure her if they could make the hartal a success. After being assured the BNP chief finalised her decision.

Earlier on Sunday BNP standing committee sat for a long time but could not decide on the programmes.

BNP standing committee member Rafiqul Islam Mian said the chairperson took the decision following a series of discussion in the party forum.

"A number proposals were placed at the standing committee meeting. We discussed all the options but finally we decided on the hartal," he said.

Another member of the committee, however, confirmed that hartal and blockade programmes were strongly opposed at the meeting and the chairperson also sided with 'positive programmes'.

ASM Hannan Shah, a member of the standing committee, said people now want hartal as there is no alternative but to enforce a hartal to protest the government repression.

Both Rafiqul and Hannan claimed that party regained its organisational strength to make any anti-government movement successful as they have completed reorganisation process of the party from grassroots level.

They asserted that BNP had proved its organisational ability by holding divisional grand rallies amid huge obstacles from the government.

Meanwhile, Nazrul Islam Khan, another standing committee member, yesterday at a briefing said the hartal for June 27 was announced to mount pressure on the government to meet their demands.

2 Ms sign up

FROM PAGE 1
where nomination papers were taken in an orderly and peaceful manner.

A total of 322 people have sought candidacy for 41 councillors' posts in as many wards and 67 for 14 reserved seats for women.

Only one woman, Fatema Badhsa, has sought to be candidate for councillor.

MOHIUDDIN
Mohiuddin's resignation is the first in the history of city corporation election. No incumbent mayor had previously stood down from the post before seeking re-election.

Mohiuddin, also president of city AL, decided to step down after the EC made it clear that it will strictly enforce the electoral laws.

He submitted his resignation letter to Manzur Elahi, CCC chief executive officer, at the latter's office at around 10:30am.

As per the local government (city corporation) law, he also handed over mayoral responsibilities to CCC panel's mayor No-1 Zahirul Alam Dobbash.

After resignation, Mohiuddin told reporters that he had always worked for the welfare of the people during his 16-year tenure as mayor.

He also claimed he had 100 percent success in implementing local government projects.

Later, he filed application as a candidate of Nagorik Committee, a forum of pro-liberalisation force professionals.

Local analysts believe things might get tricky for Mohiuddin if Rezaul Karim of the AL faction led by local lawmaker Nurul Islam, and

Ishaq, chairman of AL's election observation committee, remain in the race.

AL leaders Kazi Enamul Haq Danu, Mahtabuddin Chowdhury, AZM Nasir Uddin, M Abdul Latif and Saifuzzaman Chowdhury too had collected application forms for the mayoral post. But they did not file those.

FEUDS CONTAINED IN BNP
Chittagong city BNP President Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury met leaders of district BNP leaders on Wednesday night.

The same night he also had a meeting with city BNP leaders who strongly opposed the decision to back Manjur.

At the meetings, leaders agreed to work for Manjur, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

Manjur went to the RO's office to file the application at around 3:20pm.

He was accompanied by Khasru, Chittagong south district unit President Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, Chittagong Unnayan Andolon Convenor Abul Kashem Chowdhury and city BNP General Secretary Shahadat Hossain.

Manjur will contest as a candidate of Chittagong Unnayan Andolon, a platform of pro-BNP professionals.

Talking to reporters afterwards, Khasru said though his party does not trust the Election Commission for its role in the Bhola election, it has decided to be involved in the CCC polls, as it is an election-oriented organisation.

After submitting papers, Manjur claimed he has been enjoying full support from BNP.

Hartal called

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on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday, organised by Awami Jubo League in protest at Khaleda Zia's allegations against the ruling party during Wednesday's rally.

"Khaleda Zia proved once again that there is no connection between her work and speech since she declared crusade against hartal while she was in power," said Ashraf, also LGRD and cooperatives minister.

He also vowed to hold the trial of war criminals in the country as mandated by the people.

Terming Khaleda's rally speech false and fabricated, the AL spokesperson said the opposition leader's age records and educational qualifications are false and people can't expect anything good from her.

"During her five-year tenure, Khaleda Zia made ours the worst corrupted country for four consecutive years, whitened black money, siphoned off ten thousand crore taka abroad, created militancy and did not add a single megawatt of electricity in the national grid," said Ashraf.

"The present government has added 800 MW electricity in the national grid and will add 1,000 MW more within a year," he said.

About price hike of essentials, he said it was Hawa Bhaban that manipulated the price through syndication

during Khaleda's rule. People were insecure during the five-year rule of Khaleda, the AL leader said adding that several thousand people including AL leaders and former ministers were killed, tortured and repressed by the BNP men in between 2001-2006.

Even they tried to kill Sheikh Hasina through grenade attack on an AL rally that killed 24 people including Ivy Rahman, the LGRD minister said adding that Khaleda's rule created militants and witnessed simultaneous bomb blasts at 500 spots across the country.

He said 1/11 was created as Khaleda tried to ascend to the power by holding a stage-managed election.

AL acting president Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury said Khaleda was involved in lootings during her tenure and now she is trying to shift the blame on AL.

"We were never engaged in lootings, not even now," she said.

AL presidium member Matia Chowdhury said the government is providing much more than the expectation of people.

Khaleda tried to oust the present government through the last year's BDR carnage, she also said.

Acting Jubo League President Omar Faruk Chowdhury chaired the meeting.

Jamuna TV

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Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) authorities on November 19 last year halted transmission and allocation of frequency to JTV on charge of running its operation without having any licence and NOC.

JTV, a private satellite television channel, went on test transmission on October 15 last year.

Managing Director of JTV Shamim Islam on September 8, 2009 submitted an application to the information ministry for NOC which is now pending with the ministry.

An HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore came up with the verdict after disposing of a writ petition filed by JTV authorities challenging the government action.

The court observed that the BTRC stopped the test transmission of Jamuna Television in accordance with law since it was running its operation without any licence and NOC.

The information ministry lawfully asked the BTRC to cancel the allocation of frequency to the television channel, it said adding that the BTRC is bound to comply with the order of the ministry as per the rules of law.

authorities obtained the NOC certificate from the information ministry in 2002 to run the channel for five years, but the tenure of the NOC expired in 2007.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam yesterday afternoon told reporters at his office that the HC upheld all the actions of the government and the BTRC on the closure of Jamuna television.

Principal counsel for the petitioner barrister Rafiqueul Huq said the fate of JTV is now hanging in the balance as the HC has neither rejected the petition nor accepted it.

Another lawyer for the petitioner Ahsanul Karim told The Daily Star that they had not got instruction from their client about filing an appeal with the Supreme Court challenging the HC verdict.

There is a scope to move an appeal with the apex court against the HC verdict, he said.

Barrister Khandaker Rezae-Raquib, a legal adviser of BTRC, told The Daily Star that the JTV authorities now have to get a licence from the telecommunication ministry to run the transmission.

Criminal hacked to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A listed criminal was hacked to death at Nurpur in the city's Kadamtoli Wednesday night while a roadside vendor was strangled in Savar.

The bodies of the deceased Mohammad Suman, 26, a listed criminal and Sabdul Alim, 40, a readymade garment vendor were recovered yesterday morning from two under construction buildings.

Police said Suman was accused in a number of cases ranging from mugging to murder. He was found dead with at least 15 marks of injury on different parts of his body.

Officer-in-Charge of Kadamtoli Police Station Kazi Ayub Ur Rahman said Suman had previously been sentenced to imprisonment for five years for his involvement in a murder. He was arrested again last year for mugging an employee of multinational mobile operator company with home-made bombs in his possession.

The OC suspects Suman's rivals may have killed him over an internal feud.

Meanwhile, in Savar, a vendor of readymade garments Sabdul Alim of Savar Bazar was killed. His body was retrieved from a building being constructed at Imanipur on Thursday morning.

He was blind-folded and his limbs were tied up with ropes. Savar police said the assailants lured him out from his sister's house on Wednesday night, where he was staying and strangled him to death.

Police suspect a dispute over business might have led to his murder.

CNG cylinder

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the three tin-shed workshops. Five fire engines doused the blaze within an hour. Both police and Fire Service and Civil Defence failed to say what caused the blast.

"The workshops and cars caught fire before we could understand anything," said Jasim.

"We didn't get time to run away." Lipi Automobile owner Israfil and his employees went into hiding after the incident.

BTV news

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benefit the government, Quadersaid.

On the Information Commission, he said it did not make much headway in around one year since its formation.

He mentioned that proposals to formulate service rules for the commission have been sent to the establishment ministry, said Quader, a ruling Awami League lawmaker.

Officials concerned have informed the committee that 33 acre of land at Agargaon in the capital is likely to be selected for building a permanent office of the commission.

The House body chief also said English version of the right to information law and rules will be available on the information ministry's website soon.

The government has appointed over 1,700 staff in different ministries, departments, directorates and organisations to provide information to people.

Quader said names of over 1,500 of them are already available on the website.

Election officers

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The petitioner stated that the caretaker government had legally terminated 85 persons since they were appointed on political consideration during the BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

If they are reinstated, they can create obstacles to holding fair elections, he said in the petition.

On May 17, the EC reinstated them following a verdict delivered by the Administrative Appellate Tribunal.

Matiyar said the EC reinstated the 85 without moving any appeal with the Supreme Court against the verdict.

A total of 303 upazila election officers were recruited in 2005. The recruitment sparked controversy as they were considered to be partisans.

After it was reconstituted in February 2007, the EC decided to test their efficiency for the post.

Of them, 218 people passed the examination held on May 18, 2007. The EC secretariat cancelled appointments of the rest 85 persons.

Advocate Toshadduk Hossain appeared for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Nazrul Islam Talukder stood for the government.

Thai troops hunt

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provinces, officials say.

The crackdown that began before dawn on Wednesday morning killed 15 people and wounded nearly 100. About 1,500 protesters took refuge in a temple, where six bodies were found yesterday. Hundreds who remained inside were coaxed out by police.

Dozens of buildings were torched, including many banks, the stock exchange and Southeast Asia's second-biggest department store. By morning, the worse was over. The protesters were gone.

Some unrest continued in the Din Daeng area, scene of intense fighting last weekend. Dozens of protesters burned tires and set a bank building ablaze. Troops fired warning shots. But compared to recent fighting, the area was remarkably tame.

Political analysts say the next step is up to Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who some say will forever be tarnished by overseeing military operations in which 82 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since April 10.

Nearly 1,800 people have been wounded in the period as the government, backed by Thailand's royalist establishment, and the protesters with their support from the rural masses and ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, failed to find common ground.

"He is more than tarnished," Michael Montesano of Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies said of the British-born, Oxford-educated Abhisit.

"All extenuating circumstances notwithstanding, he will always be recalled as the man whose miscalculated incursion led to a burning Bangkok."

Troops have now established control of Bangkok and the protest encampment occupied since April 3, but at great cost.

Checkpoints of armed troops form a 6 sq-km (2.3 sq-mile) cordon in Bangkok, a city of 15 million known for its raucous nightlife but now reduced to smouldering fires, scarred streets, and 9 pm night curfews.

"The question is: how long do troops have to be deployed on this level in the city? The anger is still simmering," said Tanet Charoengmuang, a political scientist at Chiang Mai University.

The red shirts want fresh elections, saying Abhisit lacks a popular mandate after coming to power in a controversial parliamentary vote in 2008 with tacit military support. Abhisit last week withdrew an offer of fresh elections.

Analysts say regardless of the outcome, the violence marked a turning point in a country where the richest 20 percent of the population earn about 55 percent of the income while the poorest fifth get 4 percent, according to the World Bank.

But protest leaders, now detained, called for calm.

"Democracy cannot be built on revenge and anger," Veera Musikapong, chairman of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, known as the red shirts, said in a televised statement while in custody, calling on protesters to go home.

RURAL UNREST
The unrest has hammered Thailand's lucrative tourism industry, which supports six

percent of Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy and employs 15 percent of Thailand's workforce directly or indirectly.

A source at state planning agency National Economic and Social Development Board said the economic impact of nine weeks of political turmoil and rioting would easily cost \$3 billion, or about one percentage point of gross domestic product.

The rioting spread to north and northeast provinces, a red shirt stronghold and home to just over half of Thailand's 67 million people. But trouble spots were quiet on Thursday and protest leaders urged calm.

Army spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said about 13,000 people were still "actively waiting to riot and perpetrate illegal acts" in provinces under a state of emergency.

In Bangkok, fires at 39 sites still smouldered but most had been extinguished. Central World, Southeast Asia's second-biggest department store and a symbol of wealth, was destroyed. Many of its supporting steel beams had collapsed