

WikiLeaks reveals

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which have rendered the organisation ineligible to receive training and assistance according to Leahy legislation," said the 2008 cable.

UK, however, has been training Rab in areas such as investigative interviewing techniques and rules of engagement despite sharing the same concerns with the US.

An inter-agency team of the US government, comprising members of the department of state, defence, and justice, visited Bangladesh in July 2008 for assessing "both the Rab's current operating procedures regarding human rights violations as well as possibilities for engagement".

"The Rab seeks a broad engagement with the US government including human rights and counter terrorism training and recognises the need to address allegations of past abuses," the cable goes on, "A possible stumbling block moving forward is inertia within some levels of the government bureaucracy, primarily within Bangladesh's home ministry."

The US team held meetings with Rab, government officials, NGOs, human rights organisations and journalists, facing the only obstacle from the bureaucrats.

"Members of Rab, possibly on instruction from senior government officials, have unlawfully used lethal force to eliminate their targets," said the cable regarding the views of NGOs, the media, and civil society members.

A 2009 cable also carried a note mentioning that Rab emerged as the country's premier counter-terrorism force, and some ruling Awami League leaders are suspicious about the force as it was established by a government run by their arch rival BNP.

The 2008 cable said, "The team's final meetings with representatives of the foreign ministry and home ministry indicated that some levels of the government bureaucracy may still be reluctant to share information about past alleged human rights abuses," adding, "In 2007, an inter-agency embassy team met with GOB counterparts to develop a mechanism for investigating allegations of human rights violations by the security forces, including Rab. This responsibility was given to a deputy secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs, but despite some positive initial meetings there has been little tangible outcome from these sessions."

"During the assessment team's meeting with the acting home secretary, he displayed little enthusiasm for taking the steps needed to move ahead with an engagement program," the cable went on.

The cables also stated that there is widespread belief within the civil society that Rab succeeded in reducing crime and terrorist activities, against the backdrop of an overburdened judiciary and corrupt police force.

"The Rab and many civil society representatives seem prepared to accept that some notorious individuals will die in encounters with the Rab, and they seem to prefer that outcome as opposed to the chance of the currently ineffective and backlogged court system acquitting the guilty," the 2008 cable read adding, "What this highlights is that our desire to improve respect for human rights will require not only engagement with the Rab, but efforts to help improve other elements of the Bangladesh judicial systems and police."

The cable concluded, "We may need to ensure that a few unenthusiastic bureaucrats do not foil plans for further cooperation that are strongly supported by the Rab and at least some senior government officials."

After knowing about the leaks, Rab Director General Mukhlesur Rahman, told The Daily Star over the phone, "No organisation can do anything bypassing the government. Everything depends on the wish of the government."

"We don't think Rab is violating human rights. Rab is carrying out its duties. Rab wants to protect human rights and maintain law and order."

About the allegations of human rights violations, he said, the elite force has no explanation. "Only government can give an explanation in this regard," he added.

Rab's Head of Training Mejbahuddin said UK provides training relating to investigation, capacity building, management, and fast response, upon request. He expressed his ignorance about the UK providing any training related to human rights in the last six months since he had joined the office.

Additional Home Secretary of Bangladesh Iqbal Khan

Chowdhury declined to comment on the issue saying that he knows nothing about Rab activities, nor does he know anything about Wikileaks.

US PUSHED FOR REOPENING PHULBARI COAL MINE

The Guardian also quoted from the leaked cables that US diplomats privately pressurised the Bangladeshi government to reinstate coal mining operations in Phulbari which had been closed following violent protests.

Moriarty, last year held talks with the chief energy adviser to the Bangladesh prime minister, urging him to approve plans by the British company Global Coal Management (GCM) to begin open-cast coal mining in Phulbari, according to the Guardian report headlined "Wikileaks cables: US pushed for reopening of Bangladesh coalmine."

In the cable which was sent in July last year, Moriarty said he had urged Tawfiq Elahi Chowdhury, the prime minister's energy adviser, to authorise coal mining in Phulbari, saying that "open-pit mining seemed the best way forward".

The same cable noted: "Asia Energy, the company behind the Phulbari project, has sixty percent US investment. Asia Energy officials told the ambassador they were cautiously optimistic that the project would win government approval in the coming months."

Moriarty also noted in the same cable that Chowdhury then agreed to build support for the project through the parliamentary process.

UK HOPED TO INFLUENCE ISLAMIC EDUCATION
In another report quoting Wikileaks, The Guardian said British government officials made moves to influence Islamic education in Bangladesh as part of its regional counter-terrorism strategies.

The report titled "Wikileaks Cables: UK Hopes to Influence Islamic Education in Bangladesh", said the leaked diplomatic cable revealed how the Department for International Development (DFID) had been working with the US to change the curriculum of thousands of madrassas as a "common counter-terrorism goal".

In one cable discussing British and the US counter-terrorism tactics in Bangladesh, US Ambassador Moriarty noted how their plans involved asking the country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to develop and implement a standardised curriculum for unregulated Islamic madrassas.

The moves followed a proposal for a madrassa "curriculum development programme" to the Bangladeshi government by the US government's development agency, USAID, the report mentioned.

EC sees

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Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday.

The local government election is supposed to be non-partisan. But all the major parties are busy backing their candidates ahead of the elections.

Asked at a press briefing yesterday whether the EC sees any problem in the unofficial involvement of political parties in the local government election, CEC Huda said as per law elections to local bodies will be held in a non-partisan manner.

But the political parties in Bangladesh back their candidates in these elections for years, he added.

"As the political parties' involvement in the elections [municipal] is going on for years and as it is not conflicting with the laws, so we will not say anything about it," Shamsul Huda replied.

CEC Huda said members of the army will be deployed in some specific spots during the elections.

"But, we don't want to disclose the names of the spots due to strategic reasons," he added.

He said the EC, however, will monitor closely whether the election code of conducts is being violated in the process of political parties' involvement with the elections.

Elections to the municipalities in the country will start from January 12 in Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions while elections to the municipalities in Khulna and Barishal divisions will be held on January 13 followed by Dhaka on January 17, and Sylhet and Chittagong on January 18.

About main opposition BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain's apprehension of rigging in the municipal election, the CEC said this apprehension is baseless. BNP did not raise any specific allegation, he added.

Fire destroys 100 shanties in port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

About 100 shanties were burnt down in a fire at Kazipara slum in Kazir Dewri area of the city yesterday morning.

The fire originated from a furnace of a shanty around 11:45am and immediately spread to the adjacent shanties and tin-shed houses, sources said.

On information, fire fighters from Agrabad, Chawkbazar and Nandan Kanon units rushed to the spot, and after an hour-long frantic effort they managed to douse the fire.

Dwellers of three affected colonies of Kazipara-- Kazi Shahjahan Colony, Abu Zafar Colony and Bashir Colony-- had their belongings destroyed in the fire.

Farid Ahmed Chowdhury, station officer of Agrabad Fire Service unit, said the losses were primarily estimated at Tk 20 lakh.

Mahmudul Hasan, sub inspector of Kotwali Police Station, said there was no instance of death or injury in the incident.

Hijb ut-Tahrir

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Ahmed of Comilla, treasurer of the banned organisation; Faisal Kabir of Mymensingh; Masud Parvez of Shariatpur; Erfan Ahmed, of Brahmanbaria; Mahfuzur Rahman, of Laxmipur, and Maksudur Rahman of Chittagong.

Acting on a tip-off, Uttara police arrested the six from a house at section-12 of Uttara around 9:00pm and recovered two bombs and some banned publications, said Khandaker Rezaul Hasan, officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station.

The OC said police arrested them for carrying out activities for the banned outfit and planning anti-state activities.

Two separate cases-- one for possessing explosives and another under the Anti-Terrorism Act-- were filed against them, the OC added.

The government banned Hizb ut-Tahrir on October 22, 2008.

On July 8 last year, Detective Branch of police arrested Syed Golam Maola, who introduced the religion-based party in the country, from the capital's Elephant Road. Party chief Mohiuddin Ahmed was arrested on April 20 last year from Green Road.

Maola is a professor of management department of Dhaka University (DU) and Mohiuddin is an associate professor of the Institute of Business Administration of DU.

Both Maola and Mohiuddin are accused in three cases filed with Uttara Police Station under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

SC may get

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Since assumption of power in 2009, the Awami League-led government however appointed 42 judges to the HC.

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), on October 26, adopted a resolution expressing annoyance over the delay in appointing the judges to the apex court.

SCBA President Khandker Mahbub Hossain recently told The Daily Star that the government should immediately promote judges from the HC division to the Appellate Division on the basis of seniority to expedite proceedings of cases pending with the highest court.

If any judge is superseded during the promotion process, the lawyers will protest the move, he added.

On July 9 last year the president raised the number judges in the Appellate Division from 7 to 11, to deal with piled up pending cases.

Test confirms

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months. The spill might have occurred during an attempt to steal oil from the vessel.

Chittagong Port Authority had sent a team comprised of a magistrate and an official to Charpara where the vessel remains grounded.

Referring to the team's findings, a port official said the company that owns the ship had been trying to salvage the grounded vessel in Charpara.

"The ship was under extensive repair there and its technicians recently transported 330 tonnes of oil from its hull to an unknown location. It is not unusual for a grounded ship to empty its load in the outer anchorage," said the official.

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Bangladesh moves

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Among SAARC countries India became 40, Sri Lanka 55, Bhutan 102, Pakistan 104, Nepal 108 and Afghanistan 150. Maldives not included in the list.

Besides the number one Norway, the top five include Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and New Zealand.

Among big democratic countries, Australia got sixth, Canada ninth, the USA got 17th and UK 19th position.

North Korea was put at the bottom of 167 countries when it scored on 1.04. Chad, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Myanmar are the four other countries at the bottom.

This is the third edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index. It reflects the situation as of November 2010. The first edition, published in The Economist's The World in 2007, measured the state of democracy in September 2006 and the second edition covered the situation towards the end of 2008.

Countries are placed within one of four types of regimes: full democracies; flawed democracies; hybrid regimes; and authoritarian regimes.

Free and fair elections and civil liberties are necessary conditions for democracy, but they are unlikely to be sufficient for a full and consolidated democracy if unaccompanied by transparent and at least minimally efficient

SQ Chowdhury

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Mustafa Shahriar passed the order following a lengthy hearing after the Detective Branch (DB) of police produced him before the court.

Meanwhile, police detained 13 members of BNP and its front organisations for staging demonstrations and obstructing police in discharging their duties on the court premises.

DB personnel produced Salauddin around 2:00pm with a forwarding report in which they said he gave important information in connection with the arson and the information was being verified.

The forwarding report also mentioned that International Crimes Tribunal on December 19 issued an arrest warrant against Salauddin for committing crime against humanity during the Liberation War.

It said Salauddin should remain in jail until the investigation of the arson case is complete, said investigation officer DB Inspector Fazlur Rahman.

Defence lawyers had submitted three petitions, one for bail, one for providing their client with division status in jail and one for his treatment facilities in custody.

The prosecution opposed the bail petition but did not raise any objection against division and treatment.

Meanwhile, the prosecution prevented barrister Fakhrul Islam from making any submission on behalf of Salauddin saying Fakhrul made indecent remarks about the Liberation War.

Defence lawyers appealed to the court to produce Salauddin before it during the hearing of all petitions and said he was tortured during the remand.

But the prosecution raised objection against Salauddin's production on security grounds.

The arguments made the situation in the courtroom chaotic and the magistrate left the courtroom for five minutes. He returned and continued the hearing for over one and a half hours.

He ordered the jail authorities to provide Salauddin with first class division and arrange proper treatment if necessary in accordance with the jail code.

Both pro-BNP and pro-Awami League lawyers brought out separate processions after Salauddin was taken to the court. BNP-backed lawyers demanded his release while the AL-backed ones demanded capital punishment.

Police then picked up the 13 people, including Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader of Jagannath University unit Manik.

WAR CRIMES
The International Crimes Tribunal yesterday directed prison authorities to produce detained Salauddin before it on December 30, moments after police

government, sufficient political participation and a supportive democratic political culture. It is not easy to build a sturdy democracy.

Even in long-established ones, if not nurtured and protected, democracy can corrode.

According to the EIU's measure of democracy, one-half of the world's population now lives in a democracy of some sort.

However, there has been a decline in democracy across the world since 2008.

Authoritarian trends have become even more entrenched in the Middle East and much of the former Soviet Union. Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa is grinding to a halt, and in some cases is being reversed.

A political malaise in east-central Europe has led to disappointment and questioning of the strength of the region's democratic transition.

Media freedoms are being eroded across Latin America and populist forces with dubious democratic credentials have come to the fore in a few countries in the region.

In the developed West, a precipitous decline in political participation, weaknesses in the functioning of government and security-related curbs on civil liberties are having a corrosive effect on some long-established democracies.

informed the tribunal that he has been arrested in connection with war crimes.

Tribunal's Registrar Shahinur Islam told The Daily Star that police submitted a report to his office, informing the tribunal that its order of arrest against Salauddin has been executed.

The tribunal issued the arrest warrant against the BNP lawmaker on December 19.

The tribunal passed the order after hearing a petition filed by the investigation agency on December 15 seeking permission to detain Salauddin in connection with war crimes.

In the petition, the agency sought the court's permission to detain him for his alleged involvement in the killings of Nutan Chandra Singh, founder of herbal medicine factory Kundeshwari Oushadhalaya at Raozan in Chittagong, on April 13, 1971, and 107 others during the Liberation War.

BDR mutiny

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sepoy Ismail Sarkar introduced him as Khaled.

Prosecutor of the mutiny case Lt Col Shamsur Rahman brought the matter to the court's attention.

The Special Court-7 headed by BDR DG Maj Gen Rafiqul Islam ordered the jail authorities to take action against the eight as per the jail code as the matter was beyond the court's jurisdiction.

Lt Col Shamsur Rahman suspects the alleged mutineers did this to commit some subversive acts.

Meanwhile, the then intelligence officer of 13 Rifle Battalion Maj Kamrul in his deposition narrated how the accused inflicted torture upon him and his wife.

"The mutineers came to the bedroom of my house on February 26. I hid myself in the foxhole of my bathroom. Failed to find me they scolded my pregnant wife and tried to drag her away. Hearing her scream I came down," he said.

Maj Kamrul added he was later held by the accused who charged him with bayonets and pistol butts.

"I urged sepoy Majhar not to shoot me in front of my family and set them free," Maj Kamrul said in a choked voice.

"If you want to kill me then shoot me on my head from behind so that I don't have to see my own soldiers are killing me," he recalled as saying to the accused.

He later managed to survive and leave the BDR headquarters. He brought allegations against four accused of 24 Rifle Battalion who later cross-examined him.

Earlier, 20 accused cross-examined the witness No 28. The court has been adjourned till 9:00am of January 1.

As many as 74 people, including 57 army officers, were killed during the February 25-26 mutiny at BDR Headquarters last year.

TOLL COLLECTION Hermaphrodite beaten to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A hermaphrodite died and six others were injured allegedly after being beaten up by a mob in the city's Badda area yesterday.

Following the death of Papiya, 32, more than a hundred hermaphrodites staged a demonstration protesting the murder and demanded punishment to the killers.

The injured--Sumi, 25, Shapla, 28, Shanta, 16, Munmun, 25, Masuma, 25, and Mohona, 25--were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

According to the injured, around 20 locals of Nayanagar at Bhatara beat them up mercilessly and pushed Papiya off the rooftop of a six-storey building.

However, police and locals denied the allegation saying, the deceased slipped as she was climbing down the sewerage pipe of the building.

Witnesses said the incident took place when a group of hermaphrodites went to one Rezaul's house at 11:30am to ask for money to celebrate the birth of a newborn. They got into a row over the sum of money which resulted in a violent clash.

"As we asked for money, some 20 local youths swooped on us and beat us up with iron rods, throwing Papiya down from the rooftop," Munmun, one of the injured, told The Daily Star.

Shahjahan Bhuiyan, sub-inspector of Badda Police Station, said Papiya slipped and fell when she tried to climb down the rooftop using the pipe.

However, the others were injured during a clash with the locals, he added.

Edible oil

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meeting with the refiners and importers at the commerce ministry chaired by Ghulam Hossain, secretary of the ministry.

As per the decision, a litre of bottled soybean oil will cost consumers Tk 103 in Dhaka and Tk 102 in Chittagong.

The mill gate price of loose soybean oil has been fixed at Tk 88 per litre and palm oil at Tk 84 in Dhaka. In Chittagong, it is Tk 87 and 83.

At consumer level, price of loose soybean oil is Tk 90 per litre and palm oil Tk 86 in Dhaka. The price is Tk 89 and 85 in Chittagong.

The new price will be effective for next 15 days.

Announcing the price, AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said private importers feel discouraged to import edible oil, as the international market is volatile.

"Prices of edible oil have gone up in the international market. Edible oil was sold at \$1,320 per tonne on the international market today [yesterday]. Businessmen feel discouraged if prices of oil are capped," Azad said at a press conference at the commerce ministry.

On December 5, the commerce ministry fixed the price of loose soybean oil at Tk 86 per litre in Dhaka and Tk 84 in Chittagong at consumer level. The price of bottled oil was fixed at Tk 99 in Dhaka and Tk 97 in Chittagong.

"The new price will come into effect from tomorrow [today] and will continue for the next 15 days. The committee will again fix the price after that," said the FBCCI president.

He said members of consumers' rights protection department and mobile courts will monitor the markets for checking any price manipulation.

The commerce ministry secretary said the committee will sit every 15 days given the volatility of the price on international market.

"So, we need to sit frequently for controlling the unusual price hike of the item in local market," he said.

Mujibur Rahman, chief of the seven-member edible oil price fixation committee, said they tried to develop a common procedure in determining the new price.

Rahman, chairman of Bangladesh Tariff Commission, said the new prices have been fixed on the basis of import price of edible oil a month ago. Last month, the price was \$1,004 per tonne.

The profit has been fixed at one taka per litre, he said, adding, other costs like loading and unloading, transport and value added tax have also been considered in fixing the new price.

"We also have to monitor the supply level of edible oil so we do not face any crisis in the local market," he noted.

Build capacity

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crucial climate change issue.

He said the rich countries, particularly the United States, are not willing to address the problem but should take it with utmost seriousness.

Eminent environmentalist Dr Atiq Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), who moderated the session held at a city hotel, stressed the need for involving local communities to implement the adaptation programmes.

"Now the negotiators are discussing a short-term global fund of yearly 10 billion dollars. But the poor people of coastal communities in Bangladesh have already spent more than that to adapt to climate change," he said.

"The local governments as well as local communities are two vital components for climate change adaptation," he added.

Criticising the role of the developed countries in reducing climate risks, he said, "The poor are paying a lot due to climate change... the rich also must pay."

UNDP Resident Representative Robert Juhkam, Dr Asaduzzaman of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), among others, spoke at the roundtable chaired by Environment and Forests Secretary Dr Mihir Kanti Majumder.

Dr Mihir Kanti Majumder said the government is working on capacity building of officials working with different government agencies.

Dr Atiq, member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said

Bangladesh is the most vulnerable country to climate change and many indicators of climate vulnerability have already emerged in the country.

Expressing satisfaction over Bangladesh's role in Cancun Climate Conference, Dr Atiq said Bangladesh played a very positive role with better coordination during the conference.

UNDP Resident Representative Robert Juhkam said the Cancun Adaptation Framework established an extensive list of activities covering planning, projects, vulnerability assessments, disaster risk reduction, and knowledge and information sharing that will help nations adapt to climate change.

He said Bangladesh is already a leader in climate change adaptation and is well positioned to benefit significantly from the adaptation fund.

Juhkam assured that the UNDP will continue its support to Bangladesh in addressing the climate change impacts.

Acid attack

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returning from an invitation on a rickshaw. Selim was pulling the rickshaw.

According to the victims, an unknown face threw acid on them when their rickshaw reached Labagh Dhal (slope) around 11:00pm.

The motive behind the acid-throw could not be known instantly.

Mohammad Selimuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Labagh Police station, confirmed the incident.

Hijacked ship

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or tortured them, she said while briefing reporters at the foreign ministry after a meeting with the family members of the hostages.

She also outright rejected the allegation that the government delayed taking any steps to rescue the 26 Bangladeshis.

Talking about previous records of ship hijackings, she said Somali pirates took on average 43 days in 2008, 90 days in 2009, and 141 days this year in releasing hostages.

So the statistics suggest that it will take time to rescue them [hostages]. "But we are very positive about their rescue and safe return in shortest possible time," she noted.

"We must have to have patience as there is a certain process of resolving the crisis," the minister observed.

Asked about the steps taken by the government for the rescue of the hostages, Dipu Moni said the government has contacted all international organisations, neighbouring countries of Somalia and others concerned, seeking their help in this regard.

About their response, she said, "We are getting support from all quarters in resolving the issue."

She, however, declined to elaborate the measures taken to rescue the ship and the sailors.