

BSF killed five in July

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least five Bangladeshis were killed and 11 others injured allegedly by Indian Border Security Force last month despite repeated assurances from India about halting such incidents, said rights organisation Odhikar yesterday.

Furthermore, six people were subjected to extrajudicial killing by law enforcers and among them three were killed by Rapid Action Battalion and three by Ansar, it said in its monthly human rights report of July.

At least 14 people were killed due to lynching by mobs, the report said with an observation that due to a weak criminal justice system, the tendency of taking the law into one's own hands is increasing.

The rights body said a total of 25 women were killed on dowry issues and 55 were raped in July.

Due to political violence, a total of 14 people were killed and 1123 were injured last month, it reported, adding that at least 46 intra-party feuds took place in Awami League while 11 in BNP.

Workers' unrest erupted in many readymade garment factories, leaving a total of 116 workers injured, the main reason for the unrest being termination of workers, it revealed.

The government imposed section 144 at least five times in the country to throttle political rallies which Odhikar believes is a violation of a citizen's constitutional rights.

Odhikar prepared the report with information gathered by its network of human rights defenders and by monitoring media reports in twelve national daily newspapers.

Telecoms

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That Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), National Board of Revenue (NBR), and the operators should sign a memorandum of understanding," Hasanul Haq Inu, chief of the panel, told newsmen after a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Differing with the recommendations, BTRC Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Zia Ahmed said the MoU should be between the attorney general, the ministries concerned and the mobile operators, according to meeting sources.

Inu said the committee expressed concern over the slow process of renewing the licences. "We have supported the decision taken by the finance minister-led government committee, which had opined in favour of signing the MoU between the BTRC, NBR and the mobile phone operators."

The meeting was held on July 26. The operators have filed cases in the High Court over the licence renewal issue. The telecom regulator also moved the Supreme Court with appeal petitions. All the cases are still pending with the courts.

Regarding the cases, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal lawmaker Inu said if the MoU is signed, both the sides will withdraw their cases. Therefore, signing of the MoU is very important.

Asked about the BTRC chairman's objection to the signing of the MoU, he said it was not a matter of concern. The committee has asked the telecom ministry to resolve the issue without any further delay.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone after the meeting, BTRC Chairman Zia Ahmed said the government should not impose any decision on the regulator. Rather, suggestions should come from the regulator to the government.

But if the ministry orders the regulator to renew the licences and extend the deadline for payment of fees, the BTRC would follow that, he added.

According to the telecom law, he said, the operators should get their licences on full payment of the fees.

The government will lose several hundred crores of taka if the operators are allowed to pay the renewal fees and spectrum charges in three instalments as recommended by the ministry, mentioned Zia.

Remove illegal structures, free Buriganga

River taskforce asks DCC-South

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National taskforce on river recovery yesterday asked Dhaka South City Corporation to evict the illegal occupiers from Buckland embankment along the Buriganga to restore the adjacent road within a week.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan said this after a meeting of the taskforce at the secretariat. He was briefing newsmen on the taskforce's decisions to save rivers from encroachment and pollution.

The road from Shashanghat to Lalbagh is occupied by unauthorised kitchen markets and vendors in the Shyambazar portion of the Buckland dam.

Construction of a central effluent treatment plant (ETP) for tannery industries would be completed within the next one and a half years in Savar, noted the minister, also the chief of the taskforce.

From now on, no industrialist will be considered for awarding the status of commercially important person (CIP) unless he/she sets up a functional ETP in his/her factory, he added.

The industries ministry has so far set up 68 ETPs in 27 BSCIC industrial zones across the country.

The deputy commissioners (DC) concerned have

finished setting up most of the boundary pillars along the four rivers in Dhaka. The job remained incomplete at some places due to "contractors' negligence," mentioned Shahjahan.

The panel decided to save the river Haker in Jessore, Karnaphuli in Chittagong and Shuvalya and Shyampur canals in the capital from the clutches of encroachers and polluters.

It instructed Dhaka Wasa to take legal action against those who have illegally connected sewage pipes to storm drains, thus causing serious pollution of rivers and canals.

The minister said the Department of Environment has fined river polluting industries Tk41 crore.

Shipping Secretary Md Abdul Mannan Howlader said the agencies concerned did not implement most of the decisions of the committee.

Environment and Forest Minister Hasan Mahmud, Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira and Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen attended the meeting, among others.

The taskforce in its meeting in February last year had decided to engage mobile courts to try the land grabbers and river polluters with instant fine and imprisonment. But since then, there is hardly any instance of taking such action.

US lauds

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on Terrorism, 2011 said since coming into power in January 2009, the Awami League-led government had remained strongly committed to combating domestic and transnational terrorist groups.

"The government's counterterrorism efforts made it harder for transnational terrorists to operate in or establish safe havens in Bangladesh. Bangladesh and India improved their bilateral counterterrorism cooperation in 2011," the report said.

It also said Bangladesh, an influential partner in the region, had cooperated with the US law enforcement agencies on several cases related to domestic and international terrorism.

On Bangladesh's legislation and law enforcement efforts, the report said the government had passed the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2009 and was in the process of fully implementing the law, which included Bangladesh's first counterterrorism finance provisions.

The government had made numerous well-publicised seizures and arrests of persons alleged to be associated with terrorist organisations, but few convictions resulted from those arrests, the report said, adding that the judiciary moved slowly in processing terrorism and other criminal cases in general.

The report mentioned of Bangladesh's effort to comply with the international sanctions regime regarding countering terrorist finance. The government had acted to address further areas for legislative improvements in response to international peer review, it said.

It also appreciated the country's effective role with support from the US government in countering radicalisation and violent extremism and the effort to implement community policing initiative, which had been designed to improve the police-civilian relations and reduce the appeal of extremist groups.

CHT people

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of the United Nations general assembly. "Through the order, the government shows its attitude towards the indigenous communities," said Sanjeeb Drong, secretary general of Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People. The government cannot stop Adivasis from celebrating the day, he said, demanding that the day be observed at the state level. Going against its electoral pledge, the present government in 2010 passed a law in which it termed the indigenous communities as "minor races" and "ethnic sects". The Adivasis protested against the move but could not change the government's position on the matter.

However, some efforts have been made recently toward implementing the peace accord signed in 1997. The CHT land commission law has been amended to resolve the land related disputes in the hilly region and arrangements have been made to handover 12 government institutions in three hill districts to the CHT Regional Council.

The previous Awami League-led government signed the accord with the Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity, a regional political party of indigenous people, ending 22-year long period of unrest in the region.

The government issued the letter on the basis of an intelligence report, the letter mentioned, saying the concept of the indigenous day clashed with government policy. Earlier, the government issued letters forbidding the use of the term "indigenous". Besides, government high-ups have delivered speeches in the UN forum, claiming that there were no indigenous people in Bangladesh.

Three members, including the chairman, represent the government on the 12-member board. The remaining nine are the bank's borrower-members, who are elected at the grassroots level representing the 83 lakh members of the microcredit organisation. The government owns only three percent of the shares of the bank, while the remaining 97 percent is owned by the bank's members, mostly women.

Mohammad Shahjahan is the acting managing director of the bank.

Mollah involved

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on April 24, 1971, a helicopter landed on the west side of his village.

"After some time, we heard sound of gunshots from west. Simultaneously, sounds of firing were also heard from east, south and north sides of our village," said the witness, adding, "People of our village started moving frantically after hearing the gunshots."

"As faint glimmers of daylight began to spread, I saw bodies lying here and there. I hid in a pit beneath a bush," said the witness, adding, "It was paddy harvesting season and many outsiders had come to our village to work on the occasion."

Shafiuddin said he saw Pakistani army detaining villagers and outsiders from the west side and gathering them at a place. Abdul Quader and his accomplices and non-Bangalee Biharis were also driving away people towards that spot from the east.

"After some time, I saw Abdul Quader Mollah talking with Pakistani army officers in Urdu but I could not hear anything," said Shafiuddin.

"I also saw they started shooting at the people after taking them aside. There was a rifle in Quader Mollah's hand and he was shooting too," said the witness, adding, one of his uncles Nabi Ullah Mollah was among the dead.

About 360-370 people, mostly outsiders and 70-80 of their village, were killed in the massacre that continued till around 11:00am, the witness said, adding, "All of the victims were Bangalees."

Afterwards, they looted the houses of the village before setting those on fire, he added.

The witness said he was 19 during the War and was involved in the politics of Chhatra League in 1970. All the residents of his village including their family members were supporters of Awami League, he added.

He also said Quader Mollah, his accomplices and the Biharis had taken part in the election campaign for Ghulam Azam, the then ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, and a candidate from Mirpur.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir with members Justice Obaidul Hassan and Judge Md Shahinur Islam also recorded cross-examination of the witness before adjourning the case proceeding until August 5.

Prosecutor Mohammad Ali conducted the testimony, while defence counsel Ekramul Huque cross-examined the witness for

five minutes and sought adjournment.

CASE OF KAMARUZZAMAN

A prosecution witness and freedom fighter yesterday told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman humiliated Syed Abdul Hannan, the then principal of Sherpur College, by smearing his face with soot and lime and forcing him to walk through the town.

Jahurul Haque Munshi Bir Pratik (Bar), the third prosecution witness in the case against Kamaruzzaman, added the Jamaat leader was the founder of Al-Badr and Al-Shams [auxiliary forces of Pakistani occupation army] in greater Mymensingh.

Jahurul Haque, who was assigned to collect information about the Al-Badr camps in the frontier, said he had heard from people about the "inhuman acts" against the principal allegedly committed by Kamaruzzaman.

The tribunal also recorded cross-examination of the witness before adjourning the case proceeding until today.

During his 80-minute testimony, Jahurul, who was an employee of East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC) during the War, said after receiving training in India, he entered Sherpur in October in disguise of a beggar.

"At one stage, I learned that Kamaruzzaman, the Al-Badr commander of greater Mymensingh, had established a camp at the abandoned house of Surendra Saha for Pakistan army. I begged for four days around the camp and tried to collect information," the witness said.

Jahurul said one day he suddenly entered the camp and found Al-Badr member Mohan Munshi standing with a stick there.

On July 25 this year, Mohan Munshi, identifying himself as a guard of the camp, testified before the tribunal and narrated several crimes allegedly committed by Kamaruzzaman.

"I saw Kamaruzzaman and Maj Ayub going to the first floor of the camp [at Surendra Saha's house]. When they entered the first floor, I heard from the ground floor shouts calling 'ya Allah, mother, save me'," said Jahurul.

He said moments later a Pakistan army kicked him out of the camp. Later, he heard from people that the men and women confined in the camp were killed by charging bayonet and shooting near the Sheri Bridge and

their bodies were dumped in the water, Jahurul added.

"I also heard that Kamaruzzaman and Maj Ayub forced Hannan Shaheb [Principal Syed Abdul Hannan] to walk through the [Sherpur] town by smearing his face with soot and lime, shaving his head and tying rope around his waist as he kept the college closed."

On June 4, the tribunal framed seven charges against Kamaruzzaman allegedly for killing and torturing unarmed civilians during the Liberation War. The second charge relates to the "inhuman acts" against Syed Abdul Hannan.

Jahurul said Kamaruzzaman and Maj Ayub used to visit different Al-Badr training camps during the War and threatened people on loudspeakers of dire consequences if anyone helped the freedom fighters.

Mukhlesh, the then chairman of Kansa Union Parishad of Jhenaigati upazila, had gone to Sherpur town to deposit Hajj money during the War, he continued, "But some Al-Badr men informed Kamaruzzaman that Mukhlesh helped freedom fighters and immediately, he was picked up and tortured to death at Goruhati of Bakhshiganj upazila."

Jahurul also said he had seen Kamaruzzaman at an army camp set up at Sherpur Primary Teachers' Training Institute (PTI) in December 1971.

He was also tortured by the Pakistani army at that camp where he went to deliver a "surrender letter" on behalf of Brigadier Hardeb Sing Clay, an Indian army officer, Jahurul said, adding that he escaped from the camp later that day.

In his testimony, Jahurul also narrated his training days in India, several operations he had conducted during the War and appealed to the tribunal for proper punishment of the "war criminals".

After his testimony, defence counsel Kafil Uddin Chowdhury cross-examined Jahurul for around one hour and asked him around 30 questions.

Replying to a question, Jahurul said they did not make any list of people working against the Liberation War after independence; rather collected a list from the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) Office of Sherpur.

In reply to another question, he said, "Kamaruzzaman's name was on the list but I cannot show it now."

SAUDI OFFICIAL

One more confesses killing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

One more accused of Saudi embassy official Khalaf Al Ali murder case admitted his involvement in the killing before a metropolitan magistrate of Dhaka yesterday.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shahriar Mahmud Anan recorded the statement of Akbar Ali Ilias Lal, one of the five accused in the case, for over two and a half hours at his chamber.

Khalaf, 45, an official at the consular section of Saudi embassy in Dhaka, was shot dead near his house in the diplomatic enclave at the wee hours of March 6.

Akbar said he along with four others -- Saiful Islam Mamun, 20, Rafiqul Islam Khokon, 22, Al Amin, 25, and Selim, 23, -- were present at the scene.

The accused also said they started a brawl with Khalaf when they demanded dollars from him but he refused to give them.

Akbar told the court that Selim searched the victim's pocket for dollars.

At one point, Saiful shot Khalaf, he said, echoing Al Amin who also confessed to the killing before the magistrate on Monday.

Al Amin added that he was sitting inside a microbus by which they later fled.

After recording the statement, the court sent Akbar to jail.

Two other arrestees, Saiful and Rafiqul, have been placed on an eight-day remand along with Akbar since July 24. They will be produced before the court as their remand period ends today, said sources.

Police may like to seek further remand, sources added.

Detectives recently arrested the four while Selim has been on the run.

On July 1, the case was included in the list of sensational cases under the home ministry's monitoring cell.

Four months and 19 days into the killing of Khalaf, detectives on July 25 at a press briefing claimed that the incident was of simply mugging.

Ship-breaking worker killed in accident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A ship-breaking worker died early yesterday from injury sustained while working in the yard.

The dead was identified as Mohammad Liton, 22, son of Shefat Ali, from Sirajganj. He was working at United Ship Breaking yard at Jora Amtal in Sitakunda upazila.

Khaleda

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19 to get their opinion on the formation of the next JCD committee.

On Monday, BNP chairperson warned the JCD leaders of not betraying the organisation, and asked them to refrain from lobbying and grouping for getting important posts in the committee, meeting sources said.

"Dedicated leaders will be rewarded. Lobbying or grouping will not be helpful for you," said the sources quoting Khaleda assaying.

Party insiders said Khaleda sat with the JCD men for three consecutive days from July 28 and delivered her speech on Monday night.

She also asked them to work together as she ought a tough time was coming for the party.

"Ovi-Niru had been kicked off the party for their betrayal, and you all know about their political fate while I made Aman minister. So do not try to betray, work for the party and you will be rewarded like Aman," Khaleda said while addressing the JCD men after a series of meetings.

Many JCD leaders accused BNP's student affairs secretary Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annee and JCD president Sultan Salauddin Tuku of doing grouping inside the organisation, meeting sources said.

The tenure of the JCD's current committee expired a year ago. According to the JCD constitution, the central committee is formed for two years.

30pc stakeholders 'fake'

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Tk5 lakh. But DoC documents show, DMCSL applied to the cooperative authority seeking permission for an investment of over Tk 356 crore in 34 entities in 2011-12.

"When we reviewed Destiny's audit report for 2010-11, we found it had already invested in 27 entities which is a gross violation of laws," said Amiya.

DoC investigation also found that most of these entities exist only on paper.

Over the past few months, Destiny Group came under the spotlight following a Bangladesh Bank enquiry that found proof of illegal banking by DMCSL.

Illegal banking by the co-operative was creating disorder in the country's financial sector, said the BB probe report, which prompted different government agencies, including the DoC, to carry out investigation against Destiny Group.

The controversial cooperative firm has seen an astronomical rise in its capital, shareholders, profit and investment since 2009. It obtained registration from the DoC in 2005.

The company's paid-up capital increased to nearly Tk 300 crore in 2009-10

from Tk 5.53 crore a year ago. The figure jumped to nearly Tk 1,200 crore in 2010-11. DMCSL's paid up capital was Tk 1.62 crore in 2006-07.

Loans and investments grew to Tk 569 crore in 2010-11 from less than Tk 23 crore in 2008-09; they rose by over 213 percent between 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Also, the number of shareholders grew to more than 6.4 lakh in 2010-11 from mere 167 in 2006-07. The number was shown as 8.5 lakh in 2011-12, said DoC officials.

"We picked some names from the members' list to verify and later found at least 30 percent of the total shareholder fake," said the head of the DoC probe committee, adding that Destiny might have fuelled the number of members intentionally so that people would feel encouraged to become a member.

Amiya said as of June 30, 2011, the firm showed Tk 656 crore in assets whereas it actually spent the amount for research and development.

"Most of the Tk 656 crore was spent on paying commission to its existing members, but the sum has been shown as asset. It is not acceptable to any accounting explanation," he said. The report found that

Destiny had overvalued its assets to fuel its books of account. An asset, which had been bought with Tk 55 crore, was shown worth Tk 77 crore after a year.

The top management of Destiny also cheated people with its tree plantation programme. The DoC report found that a package for tree plantation programme had been offered at Tk 10,000 saying that half the amount would be paid by customers while the other half by DMCSL.

"In reality DMCSL paid nothing," said Amiya. The probe report also found a huge gap between collection of money and investment. The additional registrar gave an instance saying that suppose, it had collected Tk 50, but invested only Tk 10.

"The remaining amount was spent for commissions, purchase of expensive cars, air conditioner and office decoration etc," found the report.

Rafiqul Amin, chairman of DMCSL, could not be reached for comments.

After a two-month investigation, the Anti Corruption Commission on Tuesday sued 22 top officials of Destiny Group, including its chairman Rafiqul Amin and director Lt Gen (rtd) M Harunur Rashid for money laundering.